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REINFORCING STUDENTS' SHORT FUNCTIONAL TEXT WRITING SKILL THROUGH MIND MAPPING TECHNIQUE

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Abstract

This research is aimed to study to what extent mind mapping could help reinforce students' skill in writing short functional texts by applying Class Action Research (CAR). The subject of this research was the first semester students who were being taught Short Functional Text Writing subject. The data from the observations, the results of the tests and the questionnaire were gathered in two cycles adopted from the model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). The results of this research are that the students' comprehension about short functional texts quite improved since mind mapping could help them understand the materials and their interest in learning the texts also increased since they could harness their creativity in making a variety of mind maps from different media.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui sejauh mana mind mapping dapat membantu penguatan keterampilan siswa dalam menulis teks fungsional pendek dengan menerapkan Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK). Subjek penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa semester I yang sedang diajarkan mata kuliah Menulis Teks Fungsional Pendek. Data hasil observasi, hasil tes dan angket dikumpulkan dalam dua siklus yang diadopsi dari model yang dikemukakan oleh Kemmis dan McTaggart (1988). Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah pemahaman siswa tentang teks fungsional pendek cukup meningkat karena pemetaan pikiran dapat membantu mereka memahami materi dan minat mereka untuk mempelajari teks juga meningkat karena mereka dapat memanfaatkan kreativitas mereka dalam membuat berbagai peta pikiran dari berbagai media.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is an on-going, work-oriented process linked to the development of new skills, so it is not just an evaluative task. Therefore, the practice of learning to write in the classroom will be different from one another (Fauziati, 2002). In fact, the difficulty of writing in English is one of the biggest obstacles often faced, even by students from the department of English education. Many students still have problems when required

to write even the simplest texts, such as when writing short functional texts (SFTs). The current researchers who are also educators are moved to overcome the problem, especially in exploring what other possible methods or techniques that can contribute to students' writing skills in SFTs.

Several studies that are dedicated to find the betterment in teaching and learning writing short functional texts have actually been carried out. Yulianza (2011) studied whether the use of the Drill Method could improve students' ability to write SFTs, especially short messages. The result is that the students' ability was quite good. Factors influencing the level of students' success were also investigated; namely the role of the teacher in explaining how to write SFTs and in providing equal learning opportunities for students to practice writing. Meanwhile, other factors hindering the success are students' doubt in making mistakes and indecision in choosing the right words to write.

Sanytasari (2011) examined how significantly the usage of Inside-Outside Circle technique could improve students' skill to write short functional texts, in which the researcher found it quite significant. Another similar research is an experimental study conducted by Hananingrum (2012) to students of SMA 1 Gebog Kudus. It was found that the mastery of writing SFTs of students who used the Inside-Outside Circle technique was considered quite well. In addition, using the technique could motivate students in learning to write the texts. Wijokongko (2012) explored whether pictures could help increase students' competence in writing short functional texts. The result of the study is that qualitatively, there was a development in the student learning process. The use of pictures when writing functional texts was gradually increasing because pictures are considered to be able to make students interact with both teachers and their peers more easily. However, there were some students who still felt doubtful. This can be seen when there were some students who were silent even though they did not understand the teacher's explanation regarding the material. Regarding the improvement in students' writing skills, quantitatively there was an increase, which can be seen from the average pre-test and post-test results from three cycles. In addition, an increase can also be detected from the average results of the questionnaire distributed to students.

Furthermore, Sholeh (2014) tried to examine whether the use of mobile phones could also improve students' ability to write SFTs at SMP Negeri 1 Gedangan, Sidoarjo. The CAR was performed in two cycles, where the first cycle was carried out using a cell phone without a hyperlink, while in the second cycle a hyperlink was used with the cell phone. Sholeh found that the use of mobile phones could improve students' skills when studying SFTs. Riance (2015) investigated whether the utilization of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) and Visual Dictionary approaches could enhance the ability to write SFTs for deaf students at the Extraordinary High School Lubuklinggau. The CAR consisted of three cycles in which the data collection technique used tests, observations and questionnaires. Insiyah (2019) also examined whether applying CTL could improve students' mastery when writing SFTs at SMP N 2 Banyubiru. CAR was carried out in two cycles, where in every cycle there was one meeting. The results of the research are that the application of CTL ran smoothly and students looked more enthusiastic. Moreover, teachers could carry out their teaching activities well and the CTL applied could increase students' understanding of the material and could also improve students' skills in writing SFTs. Other studies done by Kusumaningsih (2008), Pamungkas (2012) and Fujianti (2019) focused on investigating whether mind mapping was effective in improving students' writing skill of different kinds of texts. Similar to the current research, Fahmi (2019) wanted to find out whether using mind maps could develop students' writing of functional texts, particularly procedure text. The results of his research were that students gained better grades and the response was positive when

both teacher and students were asked about the implementation of the technique in their class.

In regard to the kind of text being studied above, short functional text (SFT) is a type of informational text to help recipients of information understands information quickly and can be practiced in everyday life. Short functional texts are usually characterized by the use of simple, clear, and concise sentences, the use of images or symbols, and the use of particular words or letters since they are intended to make readers understand the text quickly (Cameron & Myers, 2013; Harmer, 2018). It is also known as a short text containing directions, orders, prohibitions, notifications, warnings, announcements, greeting cards, short messages, shopping lists, invitations, and others that contain meaning and are usually used in daily communication by people.

Mastering SFTs can be done through numerous methods and techniques as aforementioned research done by different researchers. One of the common techniques used in EFL classes is mind mapping technique. The Mind Mapping Technique is not only very useful in the brainstorming process, it can also help one organize their ideas in a more structured way and helps one concentrate more on the structure of an information and also the relationships of various ideas. Hayes (1992: 203) adds that mind mapping can reduce the struggles faced by students when writing by providing them with a systematized strategy at the beginning of the writing process. Besides, mind mapping can serve as a medium to increase students' motivation, including at higher levels of education (Doorn and O'Brien, 2007). The following is an example of a mind mapping procedure (Buzan, 1993; The University of Adelaide, 2014). Creating a mind map is commonly started with the main idea in the middle of the page and then followed by creating categories by writing those outwards in all directions to create a growing diagram consisting of keywords, concepts, phrases, facts and even figures. Using colourful lines, branches, arrows, or speech bubbles is also a common way to show the relationship between the main idea and our ideas that come from that focus. This relationship is important, because it can shape our writing. Choose different colours to represent different things such as: blue for something we should include in our writing, black for another good idea, and red for things we need to check with the teacher. Then, create several branches. We need to be certain to sort the branches by order and group those using different colours. This aims to make it easier for us to find branch categories by grouping them. Draw a curved line for each branch. Besides attracting our eyes, curved lines are considered more effective because straight lines tend to bore our brains. Lastly, leave some space on the page. The reason for this is that we can keep adding charts over a period of time.

Postulated from various studies and relevant theories above, the current researchers were interested in investigating this issue because several problems were detected in the Short Functional Text Writing course taken by the students of the English Education Department of FKIP UMS, one of them is that students still find it difficult to write a well-structured short functional text. The current researchers chose the mind mapping technique to be tested in the Short Functional Text Writing course for students of the English Education Department, FKIP UMS. This research is aimed to solve problems in an effort to improve the students' ability to write SFTs, and Class Action Research, commonly abbreviated as CAR, was done to investigate to what extent the use of mind maps could motivate and improve skills in writing SFTs for those students. As supported by Schmuck (2008), teachers can gather objective data about their own teaching practices and turn the problems into solutions by doing action research.

CAR was chosen because it involves many people that bring together theory and practice, action and reflection, to pursue practical solutions to problems that will be

beneficial for both individuals and their communities (*The History of Action Research*, 2019). In general, CAR has a goal to improve the quality of classroom learning practices and student behaviour in the classroom. Originally coined by a social psychologist named Kurt Lewin in 1946 (Lewin, 1964), Action Research has been widely used in different fields and has developed into various types, including Class Action Research used in this study. Action Research deals not only with "everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living knowledge (*The History of Action Research*, 2019)" but practising it also "contributes through the development of practical knowledge to the increased wellbeing of human persons and communities (Reason and Bradbury, 2008)."

METHOD

As aforementioned, this research employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) which adopted the Practical Type where the lecturer also acted as part of the researchers. As pointed out by Schmuck (2008), practical class action research aids any teacher in building up their own classroom practices as well as boosting their students' achievement. As supported by Koshy et. al. (2011), researchers ought to choose the model of action research that meets their need and suits their purpose best. This research endorsed Kemmis' and McTaggart's (1998) model because of its practicality. Its procedure comprises several phases namely: planning, implementing action, observing and interpreting, and analyzing and reflecting; from which the stages done was validated by expert opinion. The four stages are elements that make up the cycle, starting with one successive round of activities then returning to the first stage.

As for the subject and object of this research, researchers applied mind mapping technique as a way to find solutions in the process of making students write short functional texts. Sources of data were scrutinized from the Short Functional Text Writing course taken by the first semester students of the English Education Department of FKIP UMS with around 45 people in two classes. The duration of this research was approximately three months, from September to November 2021. The data taken from this study were collected from both cycles in the form of observations, tests results and questionnaires. Observations were carried out to find out whether the actions, both the processes and the results have been carried out properly. A questionnaire was also distributed to get particular data about students' preferences and perception in learning to write SFTs through mind mapping. In addition, pre-test and post-test were used in this study. The pre-test must have been completed by the students before the lecturer applied the mind mapping technique in the classroom, while the post-test was implemented afterwards. The tests were used to measure the students' ability to write SFTs and to determine whether using mind mapping technique could improve students' writing skills of SFTs.

To analyze the data which were the students' pieces of writing, according to Byrne (1992) and Weigle (2002), there are five components commonly used to access one's writing ability, namely: content, organization or form, vocabulary, use of language or grammar, and mechanics. By using those five writing components, the researchers used an analytical assessment rubric to analyze data related to the short functional text writing ability tests by applying mind mapping technique. The indicator of the success of this action research is if there is an increase in writing SFTs by students. This can be shown by an increase in students' scores from before and after the actions executed in the classroom. The criteria for success in CAR include two things, namely the success of the process and the success of the product. The success indicators are based on the provisions adopted from Djamarah and Zain (2006) as follows: the learning process is

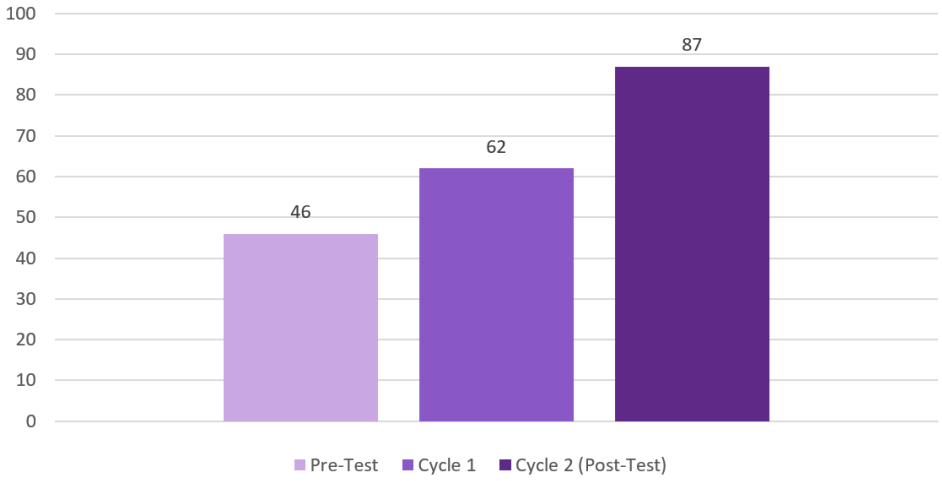
said to be successful if the results of observations of what has been planned in the lesson plan are implemented at least 75% in each cycle and students' learning outcomes are considered successful if 75% of students could obtain the test scores of more than 70.

RESULT

Two cycles were employed in this research, in which each cycle consisted of a round of steps based on Kemmis' and McTaggart's model. Firstly, the researchers planned the investigation, deciding on the problem to solve, finding possible actions to solve the problem, then making several action plans to be implemented. Materials and the lesson plans that would be given in the action were compiled and consulted with other lecturers. Secondly, the researchers performed the acting phase based on the lesson plans prepared beforehand. Thirdly, the researchers observed all the activities that occurred in the classroom as well as recorded and collected all relevant data. Lastly, to determine whether the action was successful or not, analysis and reflection were carried out collaboratively with other lecturers to discuss and identify some problems in the classroom that happened during the action phase. Having performed the two cycles, the researchers identified several results as follows.

Before mind maps were implemented in the classes, the 45 students were given a pre-test in making a short announcement text. The result of the pre-test indicated that only 46% of the 45 students could score more than 70, which also means less than half of the students could create a well-structured announcement text based on the five criteria mentioned previously. In the first cycle, mind mapping started to be applied to both classes. In several different meetings, the activities in this cycle ranged from asking the students to create mind maps from given samples of short functional texts to asking them to write texts from various mind maps given to them. From the samples in Picture 1, it can be seen that when the students were asked to do mind mapping from the given letter, the mind maps made by the students were diverse in forms, so were the details they put in their maps. The observations revealed that some maps already represented detailed information in the text; however, some of them could not show specific details in the text that should have been addressed in the maps. It can also be detected from Table 1 that among the 45 students being given the assignments, only 62% of them could score 70. This result was still far from what was expected; hence, it became the consideration of what action should be done in the second cycle in order to obtain better result from the students.

Table 1. The Comparison of the Tests Results in Percentage



TEXT (QUESTION):

1234 Main Street
Belleville, Illinois 62223
January 17, 2003

Our Lady Queen of Peace School
Attn: QP Students
5915 North Belt West
Belleville, Illinois 62223

Dear Sir or Madam:

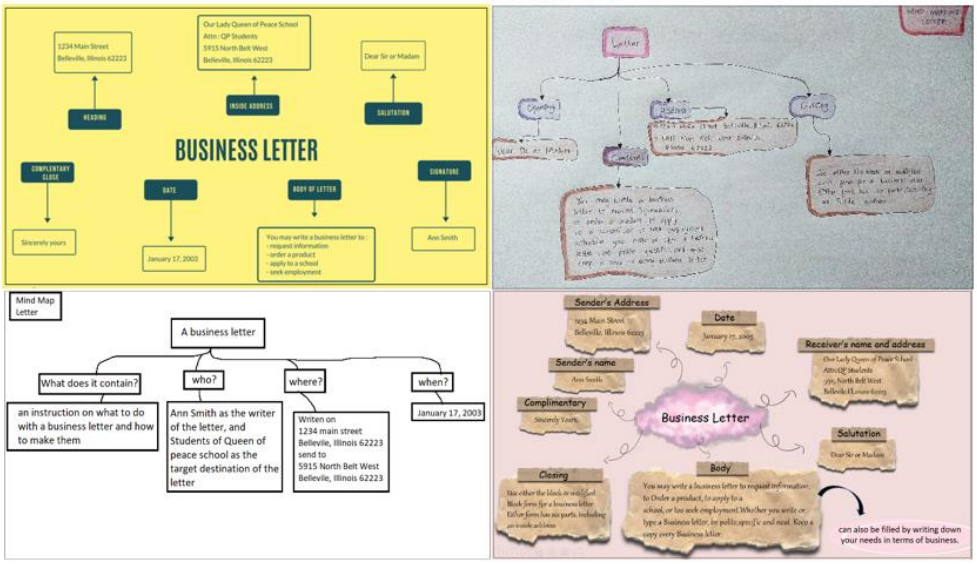
You may write a business letter to request information, to order a product, to apply to a school, or to seek employment. Whether you write or type a business letter, be polite, specific, and neat. Keep a copy of every business letter.

Use either the block or modified block form for a business letter. Either form has six parts, including an inside address.

Sincerely yours,

Ann Smith

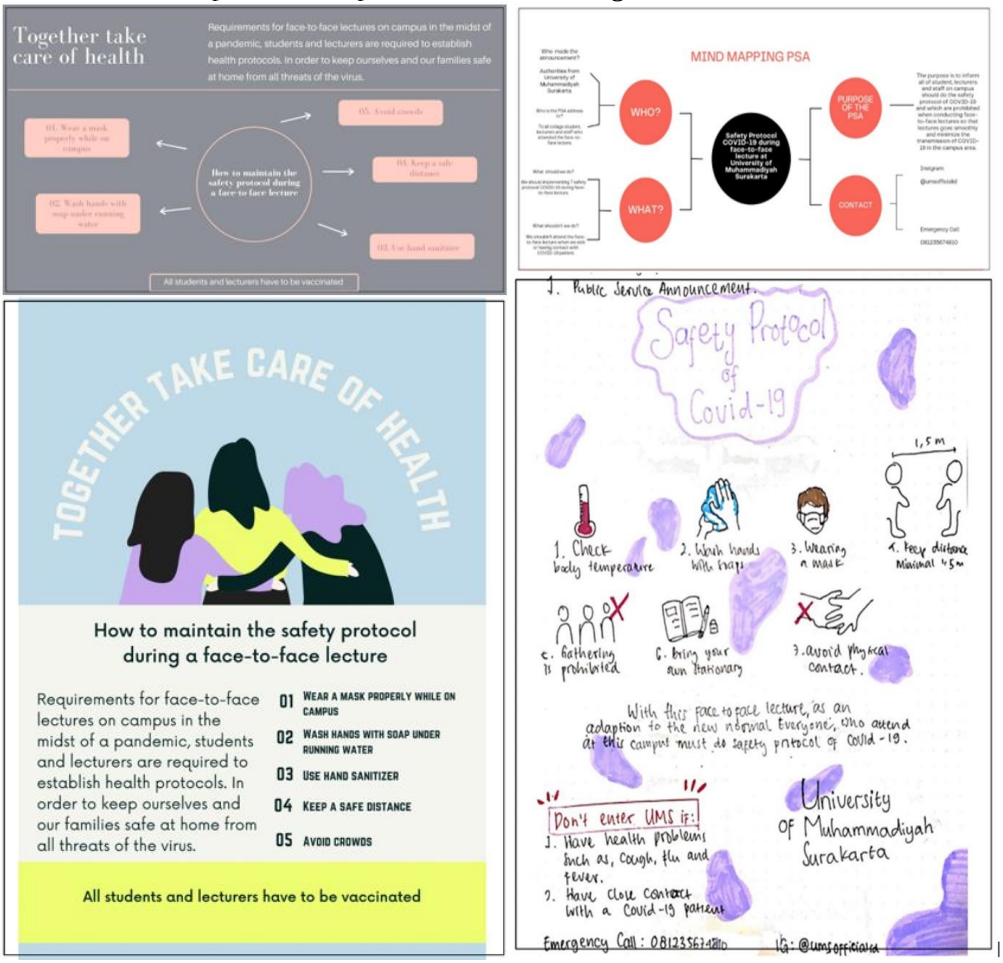
STUDENTS' MIND MAPS:



Picture 1. Samples of Students' Mind Maps

In the second cycle, the activities ranged from asking the students to create short functional texts from given mind maps to asking them to create their own mind maps and to write some short functional texts with specific topics. These activities were given

in several meetings in order to improve the students' writing skills and to gain better results in the post-test. From Picture 2, it is shown that students could formulate their own mind maps from a given topic and wrote their own announcement text. The observations in this cycle also showed that many students could use mind mapping technique properly in any task given by the lecturer. The post-test also indicated an improvement in the students' writing of short functional texts when they used the mind maps, from which the students who scored more than 70 have reached 87%. What can be reflected from this cycle is that the mind mapping technique could be applied to improve students' skill in writing short functional texts. It can also be seen from Table 1 that the results of the pre-test and post-test revealed a sign of increase.



Picture 2. Samples of Students' Mind Maps and Their Short Functional Texts

To find out students' response toward the use of mind mapping in their SFT class, a questonnnaire was distributed to them. Among 32 students filling in the questionnaire, 27 of them have heard about mind mapping technique before and 26 of them have ever used it in their learning activity. When asked about whether they felt interested in the use of mind mapping technique at the beginning of taking the Short Functional Text Writing course, 30 of them said so. Only two of the students were not that interested. Around 30 students responded that mind mapping made their interest to learn SFTs increased, one of them did not agree and one strongly did not agree with it. 30 students responded that mind mapping made their curiosity in studying writing SFTs increased, could eliminate boredom during the teaching and learning process, and could even

improve their writing skills. Only two of the students did not agree. Additionally, while four of them did not agree that mind mapping makes them more active in learning the texts, around 28 students responded otherwise. It can be interpreted from the questionnaire result that most students were already familiar with mind mapping and they agreed that mind maps could boost their interest in learning the SFTs.

DISCUSSION

In the first cycle, once the activities occurred, observations were carried out as soon as possible. As mentioned previously, the pre-cycle condition showed less than 50% of the 45 students obtaining 70 for their pre-test score. The score, which was assessed based on five criteria of writing (Byrne, 1992; Weigle, 2002), indicated that the students' writing skill of short functional texts are still quite low. Seen from the content, organization, and mechanics; there were only some students could structure their text well with the correct generic structure of a short functional text. In terms of their use of language and their vocabulary range, only few of them could compose their text with correct grammatical structure and some who had adequate choice of words in the text they wrote. The results of these score and observations were used as the basis for the reflection. From the reflection, a series of actions and observations were then drawn up according to the context and setting of the problem. One of the most noticeable findings of the observations was that among the numerous mind maps created by the students, it was found that the details of information in a few kinds of SFTs could not be thoroughly categorized through mind maps. It can be seen from some of the mind maps made by the students that when some details of particular texts were broken down into branches, the categorization of some of the details could not exactly represent what was stated in the text. Constraints and success of implementing actions in the first cycle were observed, evaluated and then reflected in order to be able to design actions in the second cycle.

The actions in the second cycle are corrective actions from the actions in the previous cycle. Nonetheless, it is possible that the action in the second cycle is a repetition of the action in the first cycle. To solve the aforementioned obstacle, the students were given more explanation about the generic structure of each kind of SFT. Due to the variety of SFTs, the explanation regarding the generic structure of each text was provided in several meetings. Some of these actions were repeated to ensure that the actions in the first cycle have been deemed successful or not. All of the processes of each phase in both cycles might seem to collide with one another, but this is in accordance to what Kemmis and McTaggart (2000, as cited in Koshy, 2011) highlighted about their spiral model, in which the processes in those spiral of self-contained cycles are fluid and responsive to each other. Arikunto (2015) adds that the concept developed by Kemmis and McTaggart includes acting with observing combined on the grounds that the two activities cannot be separated from each other because they must be carried out in one unit. The explanation about the generic structure of SFTs turned out to be an effective way to make the students easier to create the categorization of the details of information of particular SFTs. After given the post-test, the students' score turned out to be better compared to the previous cycle. Similar to Fahmi's research (2019) which applied mind mapping to improve students' writing of procedure text, the current research was also ended in the second cycle since the success indicator has been obtained.

Below are several reasons why students agreed the use of mind mapping technique suitable to be applied in improving their writing skills of SFTs, based on the questionnaire filled by the 32 students. Firstly, in terms of the learning process, the use of mind mapping made the students easier in understanding the structure of the text being studied, in understanding certain texts that seem complex, remembering

information and text details, as well as in compiling ideas to be written to be more organized and orderly. Secondly, regarding the materials, the texts being learned with mind mapping technique became more systematic, detailed, and clear because the important points of the texts were easier to remember, the texts could be described in a briefer way so that they could be easier to understand and became simpler to work on. In addition, with reference to students' writing skills, making mind maps could hone their creativity and thoughts in defining ideas and making outlines, could enhance their vocabularies, and could boost their enthusiasm for learning because the mind maps they could create were very diverse and interesting. The response made by the students which confirmed that they could generate their ideas and enrich their vocabulary through mind mapping is similar to what Pamungkas (2012) found after conducting an interview to the students. Lastly, in the matter of learning atmosphere, making use of mind mapping technique did not make the students unoccupied when they were trying to understand the SFTs since there are many kinds of forms and models of mind maps and various sources of application online. This is in line with Hananingrum's study (2012), in which she found that learning SFTs with the Inside-Outside Circle technique could improve the students' interest in learning to write the texts.

Despite several perks mentioned previously, a few students stated that using mind maps when learning short functional texts is not quite suitable for them since mind mapping only clarifies the details of the materials being learned but is not fully able to train their writing skills. Some students said they still have problems when creating mind maps for particular types of SFTs. In the questionnaire, the students were also asked whether there were some problems that still hindered them from mastering the texts. Some of them said it is still difficult to explain the idea and which parts of the text should be used as sub-points in mind mapping, especially if the text is too short or short. They also still had trouble when placing or sorting the sub-points and their details into a good branch of ideas of which one should come first and which one is next, and they were still not sure whether the mind mapping they have made is correct or not. When asked to make a mind map with the students' own writing, some of them complained they had to erase and repeat their work manually, which in turn made them more comfortable and thus preferred using the application from their phones. In addition, since there are various types of mind maps, students found it difficult to decide which kind of mind mapping model is right for certain types of functional texts.

Based on the questionnnaire, only a few students were confident enough in creating mind mapping in the studied course because they said it could still be made by their own handwriting without the help of any application from their gadget. The only thing hindering them is when they were required to make a mind map in handwriting according to their creativity, they still lack adequate writing tools such as colouring pencils. All in all, it can be analyzed that from all the data obtained from the observations, the tests and the questionnaire that the use of mind mapping for the Short Functional Text Writing course can be considered quite effective.

CONCLUSION

Having conducted the research in two cycles based on CAR procedure, the researchers came to reveal several findings. In line with the results of relevant previous research, the overall results of this research portrayed similar findings in terms of the improvement of students' tests results after being taught to use mind maps during the learning process of the Short Functional Text Writing course, which revealed a positive increase. When being given the questionnaire, students' responses varied, though mostly showed positive preference. Most students indeed found some perks of mind mapping

technique for their mastery of the texts, namely stimulating learners' creativity because they want to make their mind maps to be visually interesting and when asked to do mind mapping for particular texts without limiting the media, learners would choose a variety of forms or models of mind maps.

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