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THE ABILITY TO TRANSLATE AN INFORMATIVE TEXT
IN INDONESIAN INTO ENGLISH

Ilzamudin Ma'mur

USING COMIC STRIPS AS A MEANS TO IMPROVE
STUDENTS' SPEAKING ABILITY

Eulis Rahmawati

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ACDEMIC WRITING

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USING CONCEPT MAPS IN TEACHING ACADEMIC WRITING

Abstrak:

One of the main objectives of the Academic Writing at State Islamic Institute is to improve the students on writing which they could apply in writing their thesis (skripsi). The concept maps have often been used as a brainstorming tool in writing. This article provides lessons learnt from using concept maps as a assignment, constructivist collaborative learning tool to gauge students' understanding in Academic Writing. This paper also presents some sample materials used in the classroom activities and what approach was given.

Key Words : Concept Maps and Writing

A. Introduction

In teaching process, Lecturers are often hard-pressed for time in the classroom. They have to finish the syllabus on time so that students will be prepared to take the respective final examinations (*Ujian Akhir*). It is difficult to have assessments on a weekly basis as it would not only add to the students' stress level but also the lecturer's marking load. However, it would be very useful if the lecturers could have a reflective gauge of the students' understanding of the lessons learnt weekly so that appropriate steps could be taken sooner to address any relevant concerns raised.

The Concept maps were developed in the late 60s(Buzan, 2007) as a way of helping students make notes that used only key words and images. They are much quicker to make, and because of their visual quality much easier to remember and review. The non-linear nature of maps makes it easy to link and cross-reference different elements of the map.

The Concept Maps are more compact than conventional notes, often taking up one side of paper. This helps you to make associations easily. If you find out more information after you have drawn the main Maps, then you can easily integrate it with little disruption. A

good Mind Map shows the 'shape' of the subject, the relative importance of individual points, and the way in which facts relate to one another.

B. Definition of Concept Maps

Mapping is an important technique that improves the way of helping people to learn more effectively, and supports and enhances our creative problem solving. By using Concept Maps, we can quickly identify and understand the structure of a subject and the way that pieces of information fit together, as well as recording the raw facts contained in normal notes.

Concept Maps are now used throughout the world by businesses, schools, universities. They are recognized as the most effective and versatile thinking tool available. They are also useful for: 1) Summarizing information; 2) Consolidating information from different research sources; 3) Thinking through complex problems; and 4) Presenting information in a format that shows the overall structure of our subject.

Concept maps are helpful as a tool to gauge students' understanding because they make the knowledge construction process visible (Ligorio, 2002). Hence, students can focus on the task better as there is a common visible object to talk about with their classmates (Hmelo-Silver, 2003). In addition, Cuevas, Fiore and Oser (2002) mentioned that making students' reasoning visible helps them to see the relationship between the concepts in the material and identify any misconceptions or lapse in the relationship between the concepts. They added that concept maps provide an alternative modality to low verbal ability learners. Diagrams repeat the information presented in the text so students get to know the subject they are learning twice, in two different forms: text and graphic. In summary, Concept Maps provide a structure which encourages creativity problem solving, and we hold information in a format that our mind will find easy to remember and quick to review.

C. Sample and Procedure

This procedure was tried out in a Academic Writing (*Penulisan Skripsi*) classroom in a Islamic State Institute. The lecturer met the students once a week for two hours. The students were required to write a technical report to be submitted at the end of the semester for

assessment.

Students were introduced to concept mapping and did a concept map on the topic "Academic Writing" before the lecturer introduced to them the concept mapping task. The lecturer then explained to them that each week, one group of students would be required to present a concept map in class. The benefits of doing this were clearly outlined to the students so as to motivate them to do the concept maps. The benefits are:

- a) The students will be easier to remember what has been learnt in class;
- b) The students will have less text to read when they revise for the end of final examination;
- c) The lecturers will be easier to gauge their understanding without too much work on the students' part as it is done collaboratively.

After the lecturer has finished teaching the week's lesson, a group of students (the students were grouped according to their report group so that they could relate what they discuss directly to how they will write the report) will be chosen randomly to discuss outside class hours, on the topic "what they have learnt in class". They will then put down the results of their discussion onto a transparency in the form of a concept map. The following week, the group of students will present the concept map to the class in the first fifteen minutes of the class. The oral presentation serves as a summary of last week's lesson. The presenters have to answer any questions from the class after the presentation. After the students' presentation, the lecturer would correct any misunderstandings or misconceptions as reflected in the concept maps and then re-teach those points.

D. Lessons Learnt from Using the Concept Maps

1. Form of External Representation

The concept maps must be drawn by the students themselves in order for it to be reflective of the students' understanding. Although students were encouraged to use concept maps, the choice of external representation should be ultimately left to the students. This is because some students can make do with short notes but some students feel strongly that they need to include examples in their maps. Some may also feel that a table, organization chart or a flow chart would be able

to bring out what they want to explain more easily. When students are given this freedom, they have a sense of ownership and are more willing to try new things.

For example, in concept map 1, the students came up with their own acronym (B-A-S-O: Background-Aims-Statement-Organization of Paper) on how to write the Introduction chapter of their report. Their classmates liked this acronym and found it very refreshing and innovative.

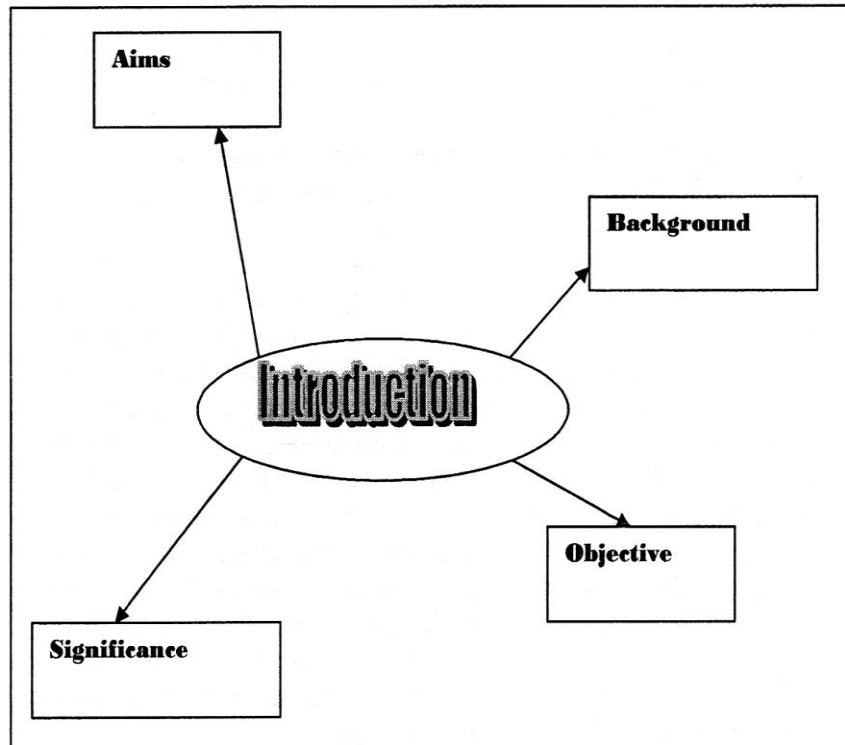


Figure 1: Concept map 1

2. Level of Students' Understanding

The concept maps were highly reflective of the students' understanding of the week's lesson. Concept maps which had only one level (no branching) often revealed that students had very superficial understanding of what has been learnt. This is again reflected in their oral presentation where they mainly repeated what was written in the map but could not explain any further or answer any of their classmates' questions. The lecturer may need to call these students up

to find out further whether they are having real difficulties in their learning or is it because they are not motivated to start on their report yet.

In concept map 2, the students did not have a clear idea about how to write their report. They were presenting on the Theoretical Background of their report in which there were four information elements: overview, reference to previous research, gaps in research and restatement of the objective. However, what they could understand from the lesson was that the overview had to be easy to comprehend. Their map did not reflect how are they going to write the overview and the examples were unclear and misleading.

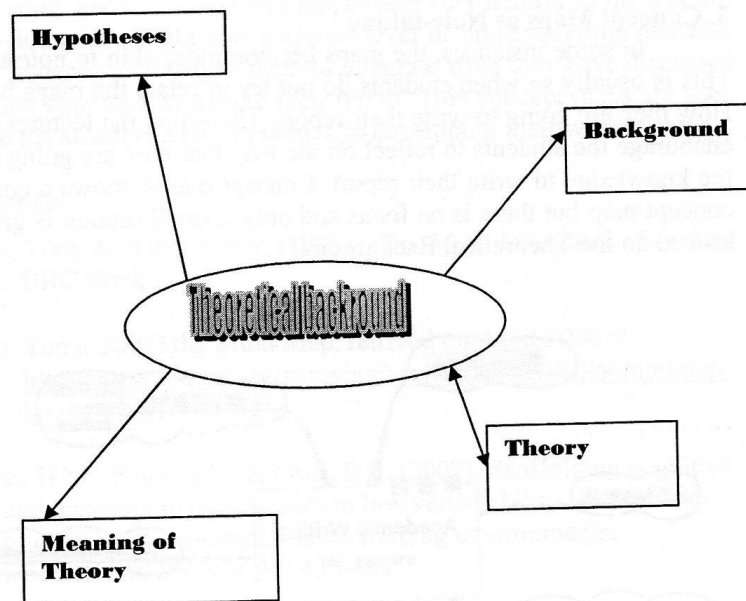


Figure 2: Concept map 2

On the other hand, concept map 3 showed that this group of students was clear about how to approach the task. For example, the way to write the Research Methodology chapter of the report is to "identify the specific problem then backtrack to the general idea". This statement is quite insightful and shows that students have internalized what they have learnt.

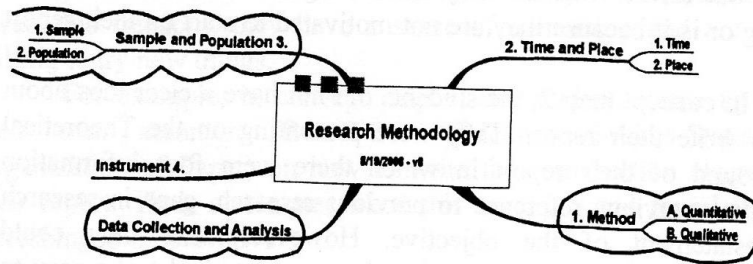


Figure 3: Concept map 3

3. Concept Maps as Note-taking

In some instances, the maps became more akin to note-taking. This is usually so when students do not try to relate the maps back to How they are going to write their report. Therefore, the lecturer has to encourage the students to reflect on the way that they are going to use the knowledge to write their report. Concept map 4 shows a complex concept map but there is no focus and only a small section is given to how to do the Theoretical Background.

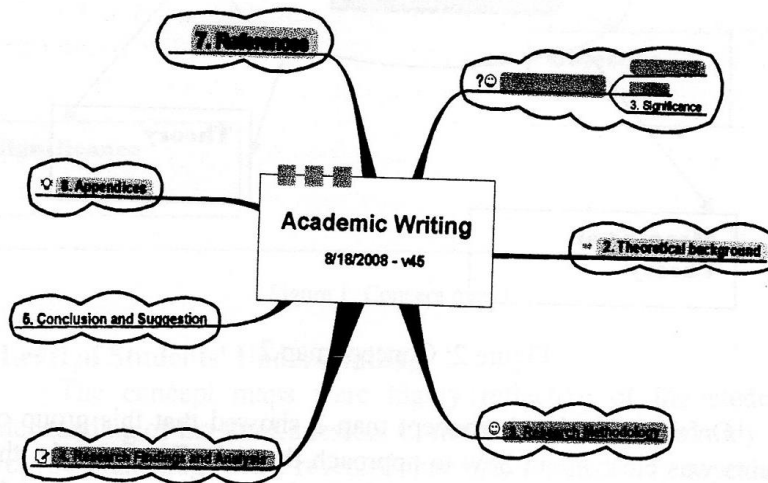


Figure 4: Concept map 4

4. Conclusion

As conclusion, the students and the lecturers felt satisfactory about the course. The students enjoyed most if the activities are given in the class, especially when they were given roles. The concept maps chosen above, based on the student's needs are very reasonable to achieve the learners objectives in developing their writing skills, as they are expected to write a thesis in English. In this approach, the learners much of the time are dealing with writing, whereas reading and speaking are two other skills to support writing activities.

Concept maps are very useful tools because they are familiar to the students and do not require much time to learn how to use them. In the study above, the concept maps were very helpful to the lecturer in providing an insight into students' level of understanding; and also to the students, as it helped them to integrate what they have discussed into their approach to writing their report. This concept maps are used to give the students a lot of practice in developing their writing skills.

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