Improving Students' Language Use in Writing Recount Text Through Clustering Technique at Eight Grade of SMP Swasta Cinta Rakyat 2 Pematangsiantar

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Abstract

This research aimed to improve students' language use specifically the use of simple past tense in writing recount texts through the clustering technique at the eighth grade of SMP Swasta Cinta Rakyat 2 Pematangsiantar. Conducted as a Classroom Action Research (CAR), the study involved 24 students and was implemented in two cycles, each consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting phases. In the planning phase, teaching strategies and materials were designed. During the acting phase, the clustering technique was applied to help students organize and express ideas. The observing phase focused on student participation, engagement, and test results, while the reflecting phase evaluated teaching effectiveness. In Cycle 1, only 29.16% of students reached the minimum criteria with a mean score of 51.62. After improvements in Cycle 2, the result is 91.66% succeeded with an average score of 82.75. The results showed a 60.30% improvement, proving clustering effectively enhances students' language use in writing recount texts.
Keywords: *Clustering technique, language use, recount text, simple past tense, writing skill*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan penggunaan bahasa siswa, khususnya penggunaan simple past tense dalam menulis teks recount melalui teknik clustering pada siswa kelas VIII SMP Swasta Cinta Rakyat 2 Pematangsiantar. Penelitian ini merupakan Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) yang dilaksanakan dalam dua siklus dan melibatkan 24 siswa. Setiap siklus terdiri dari empat tahapan, yaitu: perencanaan, pelaksanaan, observasi, dan refleksi. Pada tahap perencanaan, strategi pembelajaran dan materi dirancang. Pada tahap pelaksanaan, teknik clustering diterapkan untuk membantu siswa mengorganisasi dan mengungkapkan ide. Tahap observasi dilakukan untuk memantau partisipasi, keterlibatan siswa, dan hasil tes. Tahap refleksi digunakan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas pembelajaran. Pada siklus I, hanya 29,16% siswa yang mencapai kriteria ketuntasan dengan nilai rata-rata 51,62. Setelah perbaikan pada siklus II, sebanyak 91,66% siswa berhasil dengan rata-rata nilai 82,75. Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan

sebesar 60,30%, membuktikan bahwa teknik clustering efektif dalam meningkatkan penggunaan bahasa siswa dalam menulis teks recount.
Kata Kunci:*Teknik clustering, penggunaan bahasa, teks recount, past tense sederhana, keterampilan menulis*

1. LATAR BELAKANG

English is an international language widely used for global communication, science, technology, and education (Harmer, 2015). In Indonesia, English is taught as a compulsory subject starting in junior high school to prepare students for international engagement. In the English language learning process, students are required to master four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are divided into receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). Among these skills, writing is considered one of the most challenging for students because it requires active involvement in producing and organizing language output (Sari & Wahyudin, 2019). Writing is a thought process aimed at expressing ideas, thoughts, feelings, or information in an organized written form. According to Linse (2005), writing is the process of gathering ideas and organizing them effectively so that readers can easily understand the message.

In practice, students face various challenges in writing. First, the students struggle to write the generic structure of a text (Husna & Multazim, 2019). Second, the students struggle with language use (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016). Third, they often fail to apply correct writing mechanics (Wulandari et al., 2022). Fourth, students also face difficulty in using appropriate language features (Salawazo et al., 2020). Fifth, students have trouble expressing ideas chronologically, leading to confusing or illogical (Amalina & Yulianto, 2024). One of the problems that needs to be considered is the use of language use that is not yet appropriate in writing.

Hernindaria et al. (2022), writing demands a strong language use foundation because limited language use often prevents students from expressing their ideas accurately. Without adequate language use, students struggle to develop coherent and meaningful writing. The importance of language use becomes even more apparent when students are required to write in specific text types.

Texts are not merely collections of sentences, but meaningful wholes that are organized through a particular genre such as narrative, recount, descriptive, report, procedure, or exposition. One of the texts emphasized in the junior high school curriculum is the recount text, which is used to retell events or experiences in the past. A recount text typically includes an orientation, a series of events, and a reorientation (Siahaan & Siahaan, 2019). Because recount texts retell past actions, they are predominantly written using the simple past tense. Therefore, successful recount writing requires not only a clear understanding of structure and content but also the correct application of language use, especially verb tense namely past tense.

As a common problem in writing skills, a similar thing also happened at SMP Swasta Cinta Rakyat 2 Pematangsiantar, where the researcher conducted an observation. Based on informal interviews with English teachers and the result of initial writing tasks, it was found that approximately 80% of class VIII-B students have difficulties in using appropriate language use, especially the simple past tense, when writing recount text. Teachers confirmed that most students could not apply correct language use related to past events, which resulted in poor writing performance. If this

problem is not addressed, students may continue to struggle in expressing past experiences accurately, thereby failing to meet the expected learning outcomes in English.

To overcome this issue, it is important to apply effective teaching techniques that can support students in generating and organizing ideas while also improving their grammar and vocabulary. One of the techniques that has been found useful in writing process is the clustering technique. Clustering is a graphic organizer that helps students visually brainstorm and link ideas around a central topic before writing (Irawati, 2018). This technique encourages students to explore related language use and concepts, which can improve both idea development and language use.

Several studies have proven the effectiveness of clustering in improving students' writing performance. The first was carried out by Eka Andrianto (2015) in his revealed that students' writing scores significantly improved through the use of clustering, with the average score rising was 60.23 in cycle 1, 68.13 in cycle 2, and 78.88 in cycle 3. While the percentage was 15% or 6 students in cycle 1, 52.50% or 21 students in cycle 2, and 75% or 30 students in cycle 3. The other researcher namely Novela Hayati (2017), she stated that students' achievement increased notably, with 90% of students achieving the minimum score standard in Cycle II, up from 60% in Cycle I. This indicated a significant improvement in recount text writing after using clustering. The third, written by Ratna Sari Dewi and Vira Ayunisa (2020) stated that there was a significant effect of using clustering technique on students' achievement in writing. The result of the analysis showed that tobserve (5.215) was higher than t-table value (1.701) with the level of significant α = 0.05.

Based on those reasons and supported by previous findings, the researchers believe that the clustering technique can be a useful technique to improve students' language use, especially the use of the simple past tense in writing recount texts. Therefore, this research is conducted under the title: "Improving Students' Language Use in Writing Recount Text through Clustering Technique at Grade VIII of SMP Swasta Cinta Rakyat 2 Pematangsiantar".

2. KAJIAN TEORI

Teknik Clustering

Teknik clustering adalah strategi pre-writing yang berupa pembuatan peta pikir (mind map), di mana siswa menuliskan kata kunci utama di tengah dan menghubungkannya dengan cabang-cabang ide yang relevan

Tujuannya adalah membantu siswa mengelompokkan ide, memperjelas hubungan antar gagasan, serta membebaskan kreativitas tanpa tekanan sehingga menghasilkan ide yang lebih kaya

Teks Recount

Recount text bertujuan untuk menceritakan kembali pengalaman atau peristiwa secara kronologis. Ciri khasnya: orientasi (who, what, when, where), deretan peristiwa, dan re-orientasi atau kesan akhir. Penggunaan bahasa yang tepat mencakup struktur leksikal (kata hubung) dan gramatikal (past tense) yang sesuai.

Manfaat Clustering untuk Recount Text

Clustering membantu siswa menyusun struktur teks recount secara sistematis, mulai dari orientasi hingga re-orientasi.

Dengan peta ide, siswa lebih mudah memilih kosakata yang relevan dan membangun kalimat yang tepat secara grammar dan alur waktu.

3. METODOLOGI PENELITIAN

This research used Classroom Action Research (CAR), based on Kemmis and

McTaggart's (1988) model, as illustrated in Picture 1. The study was conducted in two cycles, each of which consisted of the following stages: Planning, Acting, Observing and Reflecting. During the planning stage, the researcher identified issues with writing recount texts and prepared teaching resources such as lesson plans, materials, student worksheets, observation tools and assessment criteria. During the action stage, the Clustering Technique was implemented in class as a writing strategy to help students generate ideas and use the simple past tense correctly. Observation was carried out directly using observation sheets to record student participation and interaction during learning activities. During the reflection stage, the collected data were analysed to assess whether the clustering technique had improved students' mastery of writing recount texts. If not, the four stages were repeated for the next cycle.

The research subjects were 24 students from Class VIII-B at SMP Swasta Cinta Rakyat 2 Pematangsiantar in the 2025/2026 academic year. They had previously been identified as having difficulty using the simple past tense. The study focused on the students' linguistic accuracy when writing recount texts. Data were collected using observation sheets, writing tests and documentation, and the CAR cycle was followed consistently throughout the data collection procedure. Data analysis techniques combined quantitative methods, such as comparing the average test scores of cycle 1 and test scores of cycle 2 for each cycle, and qualitative methods, such as thematic analysis of observation and documentation. Success was defined as a significant improvement in writing scores, with at least 80% of students achieving the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM). The data also showed increased student engagement throughout the learning process. Through this systematic design and implementation, the research aimed to

demonstrate the effectiveness of the clustering technique in enhancing students' academic and participatory writing abilities.
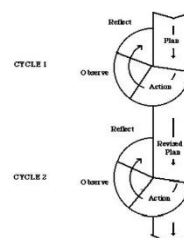
Picture 1. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) concept in CAR

4. HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN
A. Results

This research was conducted in two cycles with the aim of improving language use, particularly the use of the simple past tense, in writing recount texts in class VIII-B of SMP Swasta Cinta Rakyat 2 Pematangsiantar. The results showed a significant improvement in students' abilities after implementing the clustering technique. Each cycle consisted of four stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. In the Cycle I, the teacher designed a lesson plan and worksheet (RPL) that incorporated the clustering technique. The session began with a brief presentation on recount texts and the use of the simple past tense. Next, students were introduced to the clustering technique through simple examples. They were asked to choose a topic from their personal experience and then create a cluster map containing keywords or main ideas and their derivatives. Afterward, they began writing their recount drafts based on the clusters they had created. The teacher observed the writing process and provided feedback on language use, particularly the past tense structure. Students' writing was collected and analyzed to measure achievement. In this cycle, the average student score was only 51.62, and only 7 students achieved the Minimum Passing Score (KKM), equivalent to 29.16% of the total student

population. Based on these results, the next cycle, Cycle 2, was necessary.

Based on reflections from Cycle I, it was discovered that some students still struggled with applying the correct past tense verb forms. In Cycle II, the teacher revised the lesson plan, including the materials and assessment rubric. Students also took another test, but this time they were guided to develop each branch into sentences using the correct simple past tense structure. This activity was followed by a writing revision session based on teacher feedback. After observing and assessing students' test sheets, it was found that the average student score in Cycle II was 82.75. Twenty-two students passed the KKM (91.66%), and two students failed (8.33%). To assess changes in students' writing skills in recount texts using the clustering technique, it was necessary to compare the results from Cycle I and Cycle II.

B. Discussion

Based on the result above, the researcher analyzed the students' improvement through comprehensive data analysis that revealed significant progress in various aspects of writing performance. The following discussion provides detailed insights into the effectiveness of the clustering technique and its impact on students' writing abilities.

Table 1. Mean of Students' Writing Score

No.	Analyze	Cycle I	Cycle II
1	Mean Score	65.86	78.27

The table above shows that the students' average score increased from 65.86 in Cycle I to 78.27 in Cycle II, representing a substantial improvement of 12.41 points. This significant increase indicates that after implementing the clustering technique, students demonstrated better mastery of language use, especially in applying the simple past tense in recount texts. The improvement can be attributed to several factors that emerged from the

systematic application of the clustering technique.

In the first cycle, many students failed to apply verb tenses correctly and struggled to organize their texts effectively. The primary challenges included difficulty in distinguishing between regular and irregular past tense forms, confusion about when to use auxiliary verbs in past tense constructions, and poor understanding of the chronological structure required in recount texts. Students often wrote sentences that mixed different tenses inappropriately and showed limited vocabulary range when describing past events.

However, in the second cycle, most students showed more accurate use of grammar and better coherence in their writing. The clustering technique provided them with a clear roadmap for organizing their thoughts, which translated into more structured and grammatically correct writing. Students began to demonstrate improved understanding of past tense usage, better selection of time markers, and enhanced ability to maintain consistency throughout their texts. The visual nature of clustering helped them see the relationships between different events and choose appropriate vocabulary to express these connections clearly.

To analyze how many students passed or failed to meet the minimum standard, the following table shows the percentage:

Table 2. Percentage of Students' Score

Category	Percentage
<75	31.03%
≥75	68.96%

From the table above, it is shown that 68.96% of the students achieved scores equal to or above the KKM (75), while 31.03% did not pass the standard. This distribution demonstrates that the clustering technique helped most students reach the expected level of writing proficiency, with more than two-thirds of the class achieving satisfactory performance. The improvement was not only in their understanding of the recount text structure but also in their use of

grammar, particularly the simple past tense.

The success rate of 68.96% indicates that the clustering technique was effective for the majority of students, though it also highlights that nearly one-third of students still require additional support to reach the minimum standard. This suggests that while clustering is a powerful tool for improving writing skills, it may need to be supplemented with other instructional strategies for students who face more significant challenges in language learning.

The clustering technique gave students a visual and logical framework to organize their ideas before writing, which proved to be particularly beneficial for learners who struggled with abstract thinking and sequential organization. This visual approach helped students break down the complex task of writing into manageable components, making it easier for them to focus on appropriate vocabulary selection, choose accurate verb forms, and arrange their sentences more coherently. The technique also encouraged students to think about their experiences systematically, leading to more detailed and engaging recount texts.

As a result of this systematic approach, the students became more motivated, confident, and engaged during the writing process. The visual nature of clustering made the writing task less intimidating and more accessible, particularly for students who had previously experienced anxiety about writing assignments. Students reported feeling more prepared and organized when they began writing, which contributed to improved performance and greater satisfaction with their work.

These findings are consistent with prior research which also confirmed the effectiveness of clustering in improving writing ability. Studies such as those conducted by Dewi & Ayunisa (2020) and Andrianto (2015) found significant increases in student achievement after using clustering in the writing process. The current research adds to this body of evidence by specifically demonstrating the technique's effectiveness in improving grammar usage and text organization in recount writing, contributing valuable insights to the field of English language teaching and learning.

5. KESIMPULAN DAN SARAN

Based on the findings of this research, it was discovered that the application of the clustering technique significantly enhanced students'language use in writing recount texts at Grade VIII of SMP Swasta Cinta Rakyat 2 Pematangsiantar. Specifically, the clustering technique was effective in helping students organize their ideas, improve their language use of the simple past tense in action verb.The students demonstrated greater confidence and competence in expeessing past experiences in written form, as reflected in the improvement of their writing scores from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2. In cycle 1, the average student score only reached 51,62%, and the number of students who achieved the minimum passing grade (KKM) was only 7 people, which is equivalent to just 29,16% of the total students. In cycle 2 has increased from 51,62% to 82,75%. Not only that, there has also been an increase in the percentage of students achieving the minimum passing grade (KKM), from 29,16% to 91,67%. In light of these results, it can be concluded that the clustering technique is a valuable instructional technique for improving students' language use in recount text writing.

Based on these problems, the following suggestions are proposed as solutions:

1. For English Teachers

Regarding Problem 1 (Difficulty using language use, especially the simple past tense, in recount text writing.):

Teachers should provide directed and focused language use instruction,

particularly regarding the use of past tense verb forms.

Regarding Problem 2 (Teaching Techniques):
Teachers can consistently apply the clustering technique in the writing process. This technique helps students map out ideas in writing. Furthermore, creating a supportive and collaborative learning environment will increase students' confidence and motivation in writing.

2. For Other Researchers
The results of this study can become important points and sources for other researchers. The researcher provides suggestions to future researchers or other researchers in the hope that they can improve teaching skills techniques in English language learning.

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