

Chapter Three Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the methodology employed in the present study. The discussion includes the pilot study, research design, setting, participants, data collection methods, and data analysis methods. Data collection methods involve student text analysis, classroom observation, use of a questionnaire, and interview. Data analysis methods use qualitative and quantitative strategies. The qualitative strategy was undertaken through text analysis and coding, whereas the quantitative strategy was based on descriptive statistics with frequency counts.

3.2 Pilot Study

The pilot study was a preliminary study carried out prior to the present study. The aim was to assure the necessity of the implementation of the present study. According to Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman (2001: 74), the pilot study is useful in research, but it is often neglected by the researcher. Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman (2001: 75) emphasize that “a pilot study is a pilot study” and the purpose of which is “the practicality of proposed operations, not the creation of empirical truth”. Alwasilah (2000: 99) argues that the pilot study is important because of some reasons: (a) to experience the implication of emergent-theory approach, that is how a theory emerges by its own accord, not borrowing from the existing theories, and (b) to explore the phenomena or the observed theories.

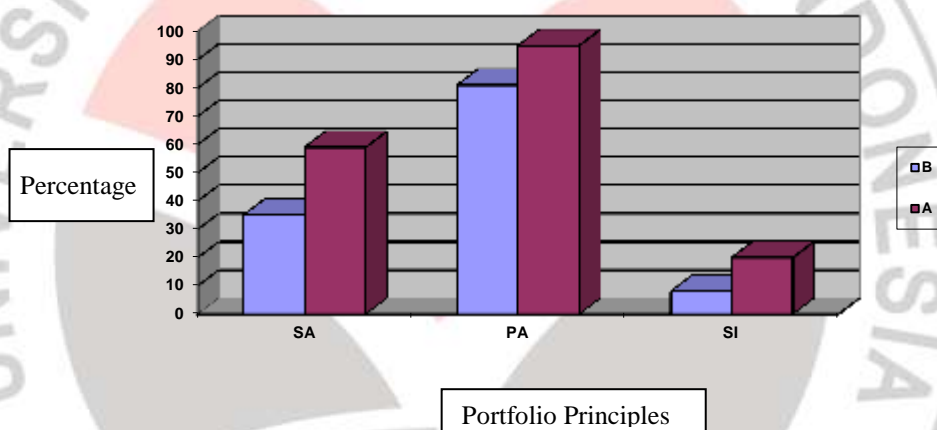
In relation to the present study, a pilot study was undertaken with the following procedures:

- Choosing two sites of pilot study, namely universities, in which one was considered to have implemented portfolio-based instruction in writing course (University A) and the other one was to have not (University B).
- Distributing questionnaires to the students in the two universities, especially their English department students who were taking an English writing course, to find out whether or not the classes had implemented the portfolio-based

instruction. In so doing, the researcher was also willing to recognize students' response towards the writing course.

From the pilot study, it was found that the implementation of portfolio-based instruction with self-assessment, peer-assessment, and clearly stated criteria as its basic principles (see O'Malley & Pierce, 1996; Genesee & Upshur, 1996; Ekbatani & Pierson, 2000; Lynch & Shaw, 2005) was more obviously observed in University A than in University B. In other words, University A had been more portfolio-oriented in writing instruction than University B. This can be seen from the diagram below:

Diagram 1: The Comparison of Portfolio-Based Instruction Implementation in University A and University B



Note:
 SA = Self-assessment
 PA = Peer-assessment
 SI = Student involvement for clearly stated criteria

Another considerable finding of the pilot study was that the University A students tended to be more motivated in joining the writing course than the University B students. This is relevant with one aspect to be addressed in the present study in that it can generate personal empowerment in which one of the indicators is affection as indicated in Table 9. In this concern, the majority of the University A students felt motivated and confident that they were capable of writing English texts after the course. This can be recognized from one of the University A students' responses originally quoted by the researcher:

“Perkuliahan ini unik dan menyenangkan. Selama mengikuti kelas writing, kelas inilah yang dapat memotivasi saya untuk menulis, bukan hanya dijejali pelajaran writing sebagai formalitas dalam kurikulum dan bukan hanya masalah kesalahan grammar yang dapat membuat saya down dalam menulis. Kelas ini kelas yang mengajarkan dan memotivasi saya untuk menulis dan saya merasa hasil karya saya dihargai dengan dikoreksi sendiri dan teman-teman sejawat. Dosen pun sering memotivasi untuk memasukkan hasil tulisan kami ke surat kabar atau majalah publik dan hal itu membuat saya ‘greget’ untuk menulis dan mencobanya. Intinya, saya bisa katakan ‘Inilah kelas writing yang sesungguhnya ...’”

(This course is unique and fun. For the writing class I have joined so far, it is this class that can motivate me to write, not only stuffed by writing subject as the formality of curriculum and not only about grammatical mistakes that can make me discouraged to write. This is the class that teaches and motivates me to write and I feel that my pieces of work are valued and appreciated through self and peer reviews. The lecturer also often motivates us to send our papers to news media, newspapers or magazines, and this has become a strong urge for me to write and to try it. In brief, I can say that ‘this is a real writing class’)

Nevertheless, in the pilot study, the researcher had not been able to find out whether the University A students’ texts had met the criteria of effective or proficient writing. In this respect, it was assumed that feeling motivated and being capable of writing English texts did not automatically guarantee that students had produced an effective or proficient English text. In addition, the present study was also concerned with the investigation of other aspects of student personal or individual empowerment that could be generated through portfolio-based instruction in an EFL context.

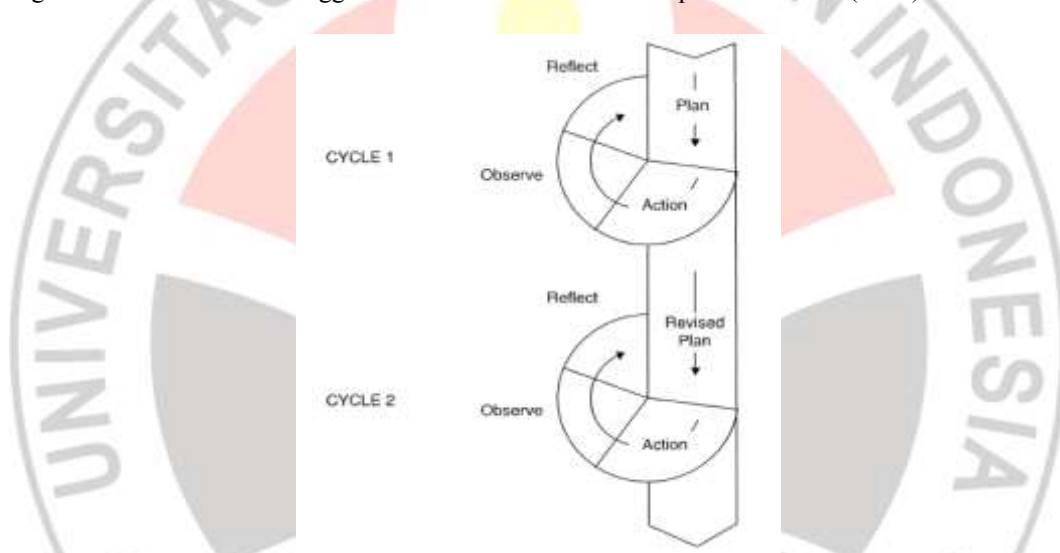
3.3 Research Design

The present study employed action research in design. Action research is the study that aims to establish a better change or improvement of a social practice (Wallace, 1998; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Baumfield, Hall, & Wall, 2008; Burns, 2010; Alwasilah, 2011). Thus, the basic principle of action research is the improvement or empowerment of a practice (Kember, 2000; Edge, 2001; Tomal, 2003). With regard to student empowerment, Edge (2001: 4) claims that action research can contribute to the empowerment of individuals. In this case, what a researcher does is “to act in and on a situation in order to make things better than they were” (Edge, 2001: 3). Concerning this study, the improvement or empowerment is primarily oriented for students, but in

action research, the improvement can be also directed to the lecturer in which he or she has better understanding of his or her practices (see Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007: 298).

In the present study, the action research was conducted in reference to the model developed by Kemmis & McTaggart (Burns, 2008: 8). The model contains four phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. According to Burns (2010: 8), this is probably the best model known in action research, and it is always present in the discussion of the literature of action research.

Figure 1: Kemmis and McTaggart's action research model adopted from Burn (2010)



The following is the explanation of each phase of the model as adopted from Burns (2010: 8) in relation to the present study:

1. Planning

In this phase, the researcher identified a problem or issue and developed a plan of action in order to bring about improvements in a specific area of the research context. In this case, the data of the pilot study in the form of students' dissatisfactions of the implementation of the writing course were used to make an instructional planning. Students were given an explanation about what is meant by a portfolio and process writing which involved a multiple drafting.

2. Acting

In this phase, the researcher implemented the instructional planning. Regarding this, the researcher carried out twenty two meetings during one semester with three topics of writing pieces produced by students involving a six-time drafting. Thus, the data in this phase were the texts written by students in the period of one semester.

3. Observing

This is a phase where the researcher was involved in data collection observing systematically the effects of the action and documenting the context, actions, and opinions about what are happening. Concerning this study, the researcher conducted a classroom observation where students were involved in the process of writing starting from prewriting to publishing the texts as indicated Section 2.4.1 of Chapter 2. After each meeting, the researcher identified what worked and what did not work to find out what were needed to improve in the next steps. The classroom observation also involved a classroom observer to work collaboratively to complementarily support the data which were not well observed by the researcher. The classroom observer acted as a critical friend to the researcher (Kember: 130, 2000; Burns, 2010: 44). Thus, in this phase, the data were field notes written by the researcher and the classroom observer about the implementation of the teaching program in each meeting. The field notes can be seen in Appendices 2 and 3.

4. Reflecting

In this phase, the researcher makes a description, reflection, and evaluation about the effects of the action in order to understand more clearly of what has happened during the observation. The researcher shared ideas with the classroom observer about the implementation of the teaching program. Concerning this study, the researcher with the classroom observer analyzed the students' texts to see the progress or improvements of their writing. The data of students' writing were then compared with the other data, among others, their reflections and classroom observer's notes to see the validation as indicated in Chapter 5, Appendix 9, and Appendix 2.

3.4 Setting

The study was carried out at the English department of a university in Indonesia in the first semester of academic year 2010/2011. The department has two major study programs: educational study program, whose graduates are prepared to become English teachers (to which the participants of the present study belonged) and literary study program, whose graduates are prepared to be involved in non-teaching jobs.

There were several reasons why this research site, at tertiary level of education, was chosen. Firstly, as one of the faculty members of the department, it was hoped that this would facilitate the researcher to get access easily to the research site. This, therefore, would increase the feasibility of the study. The researcher's familiarity with the students (in which they were the participants of the present study) was expected to be able to build good relationships with the participants, which was needed in the study. In this context, according to Alwasilah (2000: 201), it is the researcher who needs the participants, not vice versa, so the researcher must be able to establish good relationships with the participants.

Secondly, the present study was aimed to improve the instructional practice, namely English writing instruction so that action research was used as the design. Because the researcher is the faculty member of the department, it would be more meaningful for the researcher to conduct the research in the department so that the improvement can be contributed to the department. Besides, the researcher had more access for the sample class, which formally needs several requirements, either administratively or financially. In the present study, the role of the researcher was a teacher-researcher (Richards, 2003: 128) or the teacher as researcher (van Lier, 1996: 25) or the researcher acting as teacher (Stake, 1995 as cited in Emilia, 2005: 74). Due to some weaknesses of a teacher-researcher role (Richards, 2003: 128), this study involved a classroom observer who worked collaboratively with the researcher (Burns, 2010: 44).

Finally, pertinent to the philosophy behind portfolios that not all learning takes place in a classroom, and it is more equivalent to tertiary level learning

(Missouri Southern State University-Joplin-Division of Lifelong Learning, 2002), the present study chose the research site at tertiary level of education. This is because of the assumption that tertiary levels of education are not interested in having students spend time in classes relearning what they know or have learned through “life experience” (Missouri Southern State University-Joplin-Division of Lifelong Learning, 2002).

3.5 Participants

The present study involved one single group of English writing course consisting of fifteen students of undergraduate program taking Writing II subject. All of them came from the educational program that had passed Writing I subject as the prerequisite for students to join Writing II subject as regulated in the curriculum of the department.

The selection of the participants was not purposive, but at random. In this case, the researcher did not determine which students were going to be involved in the study. The researcher just accepted the students for the Writing II class as assigned by the institution (department). In view of that what is probably found suitable in one context or case may not necessarily be found appropriate in another (Clark, 1987), it was considered that one single group of English writing course was already representative for the present study.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

In order to capture the complex and holistic nature of a classroom, this study employed multiple methods of data collection which are characteristics of an action research (see Burns, 2010). The methods include student text analysis, classroom observation, use of a questionnaire, and interview. The use of multi-methods of data collection has been the major strength of a research (Merriam, 1988: 69; Yin, 2003: 97) the purpose of which is to increase the validity of the research result (Maxwell, 1996; Alwasilah, 2000). In the tradition of a research, this inclusion of multiple methods of data collection refers to what is called triangulation (Merriam, 1988; Creswell, 1998; Alwasilah, 2000; Yin, 2003;

Dawson, 2009; Burns, 2010; Stake, 2010). Through triangulation, a researcher is in the process of “cross-checking and strengthening the information” (Burns, 2010: 95) or “looking again and again, several times” (Stake, 2010: 123) of the observed phenomena. According to Merriam (1988: 69), in approaching the triangulation, the researcher combines different methods in such a way: interviews, observations, and physical evidence to study the same unit.

3.6.1 Student Text Analyses

In this study, students’ texts were gained from their writing tasks during the teaching program. The writing tasks were student documents employed in the present study to observe the development of students’ writing skills. This was aimed to find out whether or not the student writing skills improved after a multiple drafting process. Concerning the use of writing samples in research, Marshall & Rossman (1999: 116) stipulate that samples of writing that discuss a topic are very informative sources. According to Marshall & Rossman, a document is an unobtrusive material which is rich of information in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting. This is suggested by Merriam (1988: 104) saying that the analysis of documents has been chosen mostly because of the use of written materials.

As will be discussed in Chapter 4, students were asked to produce three different texts. The first text was a free topic selected by each student. Concerning the cycles of action research employed in the present study, students completed one whole topic of writing using a six-draft process. Every draft of the topic was analyzed and improved on the basis of the strengths and weaknesses. The weaknesses of each draft were analyzed and made as the problems to be improved in the next drafts. This happened to the second and third texts, namely a response to news items of newspapers or magazines and an opinion about controversial issues about social phenomena as indicated in Chapter 2.

3.6.2 Classroom Observation

In this study, classroom observation was a phase of teaching where the researcher acted as a participant observer. Regarding the cycles of action research applied in the study, the observations were conducted in every classical meeting to investigate students' behavior and attitudes. For every classical meeting, the researcher analyzed the strengths and weaknesses to be considered in the following sessions. The weaknesses found out in one session were made as the problems to be improved in the next sessions involving twenty two classroom observations.

In view of that the role of the researcher acted as teacher has some weaknesses, one of which is less easy to organize the research setting (Wallace, 1998: 106), the researcher involved the classroom observer—who was the researcher's colleague—to document all the happenings during the classroom activities. In this case, the classroom observer worked collaboratively with the researcher (Burns, 2010: 44). According to Wallace (1998: 106), such collaboration greatly extends the scope of what can be observed.

The main goal of a classroom observation was also to increase the researcher's sensitivity to his or her own classroom behavior and its effects to students (Allwright, 1988: 76). Through observation, the researcher can view by himself tacit understanding which cannot be discovered without involving it, such as in interview or document analysis (Alwasilah, 2000: 155; Maxwell, 1996: 76). In this line, Maxwell points out:

Observation often enables you to draw inferences about someone's meaning and perspective that you couldn't obtain by relying exclusively on interview data. This is particularly true of getting at tacit understandings and theory-in-use, as well as aspects of the participants' perspective that they are reluctant to state directly in interviews (1996: 76).

Regarding this study, the researcher held twenty two classical meetings with students. The researcher with the classroom observer investigated students' behaviors and attitudes during the class. After each meeting, the researcher and the classroom observer held a reflection in the form of field notes for the next meetings as indicated in Appendixes 2 and 3.

3.6.3 Use of Questionnaire

Besides from student texts and classroom observations, the data were also gained from questionnaires. In this study, questionnaires were used to find out students' perceptions about the teaching program established for the whole semester. Pertinent to this, Marshall & Rossman (2006: 125) state that the administration of questionnaire is undertaken to “learn about the distribution of characteristics, attitudes, or beliefs”.

Regarding the present study, questionnaires were designed in two types. The first one was a closed or structured questionnaire. This kind of questionnaire is a highly structured data collection instrument which aims to obtain data in statistical or quantitative ways (Dörnyei, 2003: 14; see also Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007: 321; Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 125-126; Wallace, 1998: 124). In this case, the students were asked the same questions (Stake, 2010: 99) to portray statistically “the variability of certain features in a population” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 125). In the present study, this structured questionnaire was designed on the basis of Likert scales, which has been the most commonly used scaling technique (Dörnyei, 2003: 36) as indicated in Appendix 5.

Meanwhile, the second type of questionnaire used in this study was an open-ended questionnaire as indicated in Appendix 4. This type of questionnaire was utilized to provide data in qualitative or exploratory ways (Dörnyei, 2003: 14). In this case, according to Dörnyei (2003: 47), by permitting greater freedom of expression to students, this kind of questionnaire can provide a far greater richness than fully quantitative data. This was also stated by Oppenheim that the freedom of expression that it gives to the students is the chief advantage of the open-ended questionnaire (1966: 41). Following Oppenheim (1992), Dörnyei (2003: 47) points out that, in some cases, the same questions can be asked both in an open and closed form.

Before distribution, the questionnaires were piloted to “see whether they worked as planned” (Wallace, 1998: 132; see also Dörnyei, 2003: 63-69; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007: 342-342). In this concern, the researcher tried them out toward a group of students who were not involved in the teaching program.

This was aimed to check the workability of the questionnaires whether the instructions were clear and easy to follow, whether the questions were clear, whether the participants were able to answer all the questions, and whether the participants found any questions embarrassing, irrelevant, patronizing, or irritating (Wallace, 1998: 133).

3.6.4 Interview

The interview was used to validate data from the other sources. It was conducted twice. The first one was undertaken after the completion of one selected topic—in which one selected topic was completed through a six-time drafting, whereas the second one was done after the accomplishment of all the topics that was at the end of the semester. The first interview was with reflective questions to portray students' perception and progress in producing one selected text as indicated in Appendix 6. The second interview concerned students' perception about the difficulties encountered by students and the lecturer during the teaching program as indicated in Appendix 8.

The use of interviews has been a common instrument in qualitative study (Seidman, 2006; Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 1988). In general, it occurs in a conversation, but a purposeful conversation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006/1999; Merriam, 1988). Concerning this study, combined with classroom observation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 102) or made complementary with questionnaires (Wallace, 1998: 130), student interviews allow the researcher to understand the meanings that everyday classroom activities hold for students (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 102). In this accordance, following Patton (1980), Merriam affirms why a qualitative researcher should conduct an interview:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe... We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that prelude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world—we have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (1988: 72).

Thus, in this study, interviews were carried out to generate data that could not be obtained from classroom observation. The interviews were intended to

observe students' perceptions and attitudes about the teaching program. In other words, interview data validated observation data.

3.7 Data Analysis Methods

In the present study, data were analyzed on the basis of data collection methods. During data analysis, all the participants were mentioned pseudonymous to maintain their confidentiality (Burns, 2010; Stake, 2010; Dawson, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Seidman, 2006; Dörnyei, 2003; Silverman, 1993).

In general, data were analyzed based on three phases of data transformation: description, analysis, and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994 as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 154). Following Strauss & Corbin (1997), Marshall & Rossman (2006: 154) argue that qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes in building grounded theory. Concerning the three phases of data transformation, Marshall & Rossman (2006: 154) specify that these three somewhat distinct activities are often bundled into the generic term *analysis*. In this case, following Walcott (1994), Marshall & Rossman state:

By no means do I suggest that the three categories—description, analysis, and interpretation—are mutually exclusive. Nor are lines clearly drawn where the description ends and analysis begins, or where analysis becomes interpretation.... I do suggest that identifying and distinguishing among the three may serve a useful purpose, especially if the categories can be regarded as varying emphases that qualitative researchers employ to organize and present data (2006: 154).

Student written texts were analyzed in reference to the holistic scoring rubric for evaluating portfolios suggested by O'Malley & Pierce (1996) as indicated in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.6. The holistic scoring rubric consists of four dimensions of writing measured in this study, namely idea development or organization, fluency or structure, word choice, and mechanics (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996: 142) as already discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.6. This selection was based on the consideration that the dimensions of writing in the rubric were workable for the present study. Regarding this, O'Malley & Pierce state:

Holistic scoring uses a variety of criteria to produce a single score. The specific criteria selected depend on local instructional programs and language arts objectives. The

rationale for using a holistic scoring system is that the total quality of written text is more than the sum of its components. Writing is viewed as an integrated whole (1996: 142).

Classroom observation data were analyzed in the integration with the discussion of teaching program in Chapter 4. The data were used to support the implementation of the teaching program. Meanwhile, interview data analysis was undertaken in the form of coding or thematization (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Alwasilah, 2000). The analysis was directed to address the research questions through some steps. The first one was to put interview questions into categories. Then a categorization on the basis of respondent answers was developed to establish the recurring patterns or emerging regularities (Maxwell, 1996; Creswell, 1998; Alwasilah, 2000). In this connection, Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007: 368) propose several stages in interview analysis: (a) generating natural units of meaning, (b) classifying, categorizing, and ordering these units of meaning, (c) structuring narratives to describe the interview contents, and (d) interpreting the interview data.

Data from the structured questionnaire were analyzed using a frequency count or univariate analysis (Dawson, 2009: 127). The analysis was aimed to describe and present the aspects of personal empowerment addressed in the present study (Dawson, 2009: 127; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007: 503). According to Dawson (2009: 127), frequency count is usually the first stage in any analysis of questionnaire, and it is fundamental for many other statistical techniques.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the elaboration about the methodology used in the present study. It includes the pilot study, research design, setting, participants, data collection methods, and data analysis methods that are employed in the present study. The whole methodological dimensions will be discussed in relation to Chapters 4, 5, and 6.