

# THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CLUSTERING TECHNIQUE TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL IN DESCRIPTIVE TEXT OF THE EIGHTH GRADERS OF MTS DARUL ULUM PURWOASRI SUKOSEWU BOJONEGORO IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR OF 2012/2013

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***Abstract:** The Implementation of Clustering Technique to Improve Students' Writing Skill in Descriptive Text of The Eighth Graders of Mts Darul Ulum Purwoasri Sukosewu Bojonegoro in the Academic Year Of 2012/2013. This research is aimed at finding out whether the implementation of clustering technique can improve students' writing skill in descriptive text. This research is categorized as Classroom Action Research (CAR) in which there are two cycles in this research. The population of this research was the eighth graders of MTs Darul Ulum in the Academic Year of 2012/2013 which consists of 32 students. The result shows that the implementation of clustering technique can improve the students' writing skill in descriptive text significantly of the eight graders of MTs Darul Ulum Purwoasri Sukosewu Bojonegoro in the Academic year of 2012/2013.*

***Keywords:** Clustering Technique, Writing Skill, Descriptive Text*

Writing as a skill involves a number of complex rhetorical and linguistic operations which must be taught. The act of writing is deprived of an immediate context of communication. Thus, for effective writing, the writer has to use a large number of formal features in order to help his/her readers infer the intended meaning. Failure to use these features correctly causes vagueness, ellipsis and ambiguity in some writings.

Writing becomes important because of some reasons. Raimes (1983: 3) states that writing helps the students to learn since it reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary that the teachers have been teaching the students. Besides, when the students write, they also have a chance to be adventurous with the language, to go beyond what they have just learned to say, to take risks. The next is that when they write, they necessarily become very involved with the new language, the effort to express ideas and the constant use of eye, hand and brain is a unique way to reinforce learning.

A good writing must cover some aspects.

Raimes (1983: 6) mentions those aspects are syntax, content, the writers' process, audience, purpose, word choice, organization, mechanics and grammar. While Byrne (1995: 3) mentions three aspects which make writing difficult. The first is the psychological problem. Writing is a solitary activity. The teachers cannot get direct feedback like in speaking activity. The second is linguistics problem. The writers have to ensure that the choice of words, sentence structure, and other cohesive devices are correct for conveying their message. The last is the cognitive problem. Writing is learned through a process of instruction. It is not a natural process like speaking.

Both Raimes (1983: 6) and Byrne (1995: 3) basically have the same idea, but Raimes (1983: 6) does not classify the problem. Audience and purpose of writing is included in Byrne's psychological problem. Byrne's linguistic problem covered syntax, word choice, mechanic, and grammar. Meanwhile, Raimes' writer process, organization and content are covered in Byrne cognitive problem.

Most of the eight graders of MTs Darul Ulum get difficulties in writing, especially in writing descriptive text. This problem can be seen from their score when the teacher gives them writing test. The range of their scores is 35-55. The score is still far from the *passing grade* which is 60. This means that they have poor skill in writing. This data is also supported by their statements when the researcher interviewed them about the difficulties they face in writing. The following is part of the interview:

*Researcher*: “Dik, mengapa kamu kesulitan dalam menulis teks berbahasa inggris?” (Dear, why do you get difficulties in writing English text?);

*AT (student)*: “Karena bahasa inggris susah sih... banyak kosakata yang kita tidak tahu, apalagi bahasa inggris nulisnya kebalik-balik, jadinya susah”.

*NF (student)*: “kita susah mau nulis apa... tidak tahu apa yang akan kita tulis, walaupun ada yang mau kita tulis kita kesulitan bahasa inggrisnya dan menyusunnya menjadi kalimat”.

*AY (student)*: “ya sulit... sama pak guru biasanya kita cuma diajari generic structure-nya sama disuruh baca contoh teks yang ada di buku, habis itu mengartikan teks dan kita disuruh nulis teks seperti contoh”

Based on the interview above, it can be inferred that the causes of the difficulties faced by the students in writing are lack of vocabulary, low mastery of grammar, organizing ideas, and also inappropriate teaching technique.

Here, the researcher proposed a solution to solve those problems. The proposed solution is clustering technique.

Clustering technique is a technique to divide some related ideas and write down in a blank paper without evaluating the truth or value of the ideas themselves. Then, the students write some sentences or paragraphs using the words or phrases they made before. Through clustering technique, the students have opportunity to

make a plan to organize their ideas and the vocabularies they want to write through cluster. Therefore, they can easily organize the ideas; write them into sentences in a good order.

Based on the background above, the researcher formulates the research problem as follow: Can clustering technique improve the students' writing skill in descriptive text of the eighth graders of MTs Darul Ulum Purwoasri Sukosewu in the academic year of 2012/2013?

The significance of this study is expected to give practical contribution to the teaching of writing descriptive text, particularly at MTs Darul Ulum Purwoasri Sukosewu Bojonegoro where the research is conducted. It is hoped that the use of clustering technique will be profitable source to the English teacher as a reference of using clustering technique to improve the students' writing skill and a valuable technique for teaching writing to be applied in the classroom. The findings of this study will be the procedures or guidelines in implementing clustering technique, so other English teachers in different schools can implement the technique to teach their students.

Byrne (1995: 1) defines writing as follow: writing is the act of forming graphic symbols. While Farbairn and Winch (1996: 32) state that writing is about conveying meaning by using words that have been selected and put together in a written or printed form. Ur (1996: 163) writing is the expressing of ideas, the conveying of a message to the readers, so that the ideas themselves should arguably be seen as the most aspects of writing. Some other aspects such as neat handwriting, correct spelling and punctuation, acceptable grammar and careful selection of vocabulary, however, are things that need some attention to be paid by a writer. Some skills are needed to produce a clear and understandable writing, such as manipulating proper words and arranging the words coherently and know the characteristics of good writing. It

means that the writer should have the ability in arranging his or her ideas into a possible order. In addition, good writing should also be well written.

A writer should master the aspects of writing. Dealing with the aspects of writing, Hughes (1996: 91) mentions five aspects of writing; they are (1) grammar, (2) vocabulary, (3) mechanics, (4) fluency and (5) form. Brown (2003: 244) also has scale for rating composition (writing), they are: (1) organization (introduction, body, and conclusion), (2) logical development of ideas (content), (3) punctuation, spelling and mechanics, (4) style and quality expression (vocabulary, variety of structure, word choice). According to Reid (1993: 236-237), the aspects of writing are organization, content, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

Hammond in Nunan (1991: 86) believes that it is crucial to understand the relationships between oral and written language in order to develop an effective pedagogy of teaching. The students have to master both spoken and written, especially writing because there are some books written in English. In addition, Paul and Goione (1973: 3) state that writing is not scared activity. The teacher does not make the students afraid of writing. Give the students support and let them write, because expressing thought through writing is not easy for most people. According to Reid (1993: 236-237) writing is a subject that involves some aspects in order to make it understandable. Those aspects are organization, content, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

Teaching writing skills officially has been given to the students from the fourth of Elementary Schools. Yet the students still have a lot of difficulties in expressing ideas in writing a composition in English. During the teaching learning process, a teacher should give more help, practices, and chances to EFL students to explore and express their ideas. Formally, teaching course is focused on grammar or on an elaborate discussion of the theory of writing only. This condition makes the EFL students get sleepy and bored during the class.

Angelo (1980: 1) says that writing would still be valuable in education because writing can help one think critically, to clarify thoughts, and the deeper perception. Another opinion is from Byrne (1995: 5); writing is often needed for formal and informal test, to get through college with good grades. Many tests are essay test, and even in other subjects than English, composition researches are required. Writing English can also increase opportunities for career as Fowler (1965: 40) points out that the written word is increasing demand in the business world both as a key to get job and the success in it.

According to Byrne (1995: 4) there are three factors which influence writing process, they are: (1) psychological problem, a teacher is expected to be able to write his/her own without the possibility of interaction or feedback, and this makes the act of writing difficult; (2) linguistics problem, a teacher must keep the communication through his/her own efforts and to ensure, both through his/her choice of sentences structure and by the way his/her sentences are linked together and sequenced, that the text he/she writes or produces can be interpreted on its own; (3) cognitive problem, a teacher has to master the written form of the language and to learn certain structures which are important for effective communication in writing. A teacher learns how to organize his/her ideas and thought in such a way that they can be understood by the reader who is not present, and perhaps by the reader who is not known to us.

To overcome those problems mentioned above, the English teachers need to be aware that writing should be taught in various ways and manners so that the students are interested in studying. The teacher should also phase the writing tasks from the simplest stage to the more complex one, so that the students are not frustrated with writing.

Classroom evaluation of learning is best served through analytic scoring. Analytic scoring is in order to capture its closer association with classroom language instruction than with formal testing.

**Table 1. Scoring Rubric**

| Aspect of writing | Range | Score                  | Criterion   |
|-------------------|-------|------------------------|---|
| Content           | 30-27 | Excellent to very good | Knowledgeable. Substantive, through development of thesis. Relevant to assigned topic.  |
|                   | 26-22 | Good to average        | Some knowledge of subject. Adequate range. Limited development of thesis. Mostly relevant to topic, but lacks detail.   |
|                   | 21-17 | Fair to poor           | Limited knowledge of subject. Little substance. Inadequate development of topic.  |
|                   | 16-13 | Very poor              | Does not show knowledge of subject. Non-substantive. Not pertinent, or not enough to evaluate.  |
| Organization      | 20-18 | Excellent to very good | Fluent expression. Ideas clearly stated/supported. Succinct. Well-organized. Logical sequencing cohesive.   |
|                   | 17-14 | Good to average        | Somewhat choppy. Loosely organized but main ideas stand out. Limited support. Logical but incomplete sequencing.  |
|                   | 13-10 | Fair to poor           | Non-fluent. Ideas confused or disconnected. Lack logical sequencing, and development.   |
|                   | 9-7   | Very poor              | Does not communicate. No organization, or not enough to evaluate.   |
| Diction           | 20-18 | Excellent to very good | Sophisticated range. Effective word/idiom choice and usage. Word form mastery. Appropriate register.  |
|                   | 17-14 | Good to average        | Adequate range. Occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage but meaning not obscured.   |
|                   | 13-10 | Fair to poor           | Limited range. Frequent errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage. Meaning confused or obscured.   |
|                   | 9-7   | Very poor              | Essentially translation. Little knowledge of English vocabulary idioms. Word form or not enough to  |
| Language use      | 25-22 | Excellent to very good | Effective complex constructions. Few errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions.   |
|                   | 21-18 | Good to average        | Effective but simple constructions minor problem in complex constructions. Several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions, but meaning seldom obscured.                  |
|                   | 17-11 | Fair to poor           | Major problems in simple/complex constructions. Frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions, and/fragments, run-ons, deletions. Meaning confused/obscured. |
|                   | 10-5  | Very poor              | Virtually no mastery of sentence constructions rules. Dominated by errors. Does not communicate. Or not enough to evaluate.   |
| Mechanics         | 5     | Excellent to very good | Demonstrate mastery of conventions. Few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing.  |
|                   | 4     | Good to average        | Occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, but meaning not obscured.   |
|                   | 3     | Fair to poor           | Frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing. Poor handwriting. Meaning confused or obscured.   |
|                   | 2     | Very poor              | No mastery of convention. Dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing. Handwriting illegible or not enough to evaluate.  |

Clustering technique is developed by Gabrielle Luser Rico (1983). Rico (1983) states that clustering is a technique to divide some related ideas and write down in a blank of paper without evaluating the truth or value of the ideas themselves. Clustering technique can be used in any kind of writing genres, such as report, essay, proposal, short story, or poem (De Porter, 1999: 184)

In line with Rico (1983), Hernowo (2004: 195) states that clustering technique can produce writing that can deliver its message with the same comprehension and surge as spoken language.

Dawson and Essid (2010: 1) say that clustering is a type of prewriting that allows the learners to explore many ideas around some stimulus as soon as they occur to the learners. Like brainstorming or free associating, clustering allows learners to begin without clear ideas.

Clustering diagram contains of a main topic as a center and related ideas as branches. To draw this diagram, first, in the center of paper, write the topic and draw a "balloon" around it. This is the center or core. Then, write related ideas in balloons around the core. Think about each of these ideas and make more balloons around them.

Meade (2010: 1-2) mentions that there are some procedures to do clustering technique: (a). Write a word or phrase on a clean piece of pa-

per; (b). Circle the word and let connection flow, write down each new word or phrase that comes to mind, circle it, and connect it with a line; (c). Keep the hand moving all the time; (d). Cluster for a while; (e). Continue adding to the cluster; (f). Write a piece without worrying about perfection.

Fathoni (2012: 1) defines descriptive text as a text which describes things, places, human beings, animals, etc. It describes how it looks like, both physically and functionally. The communicative purpose of this text is to describe things based on their characters holistically without doing research at first.

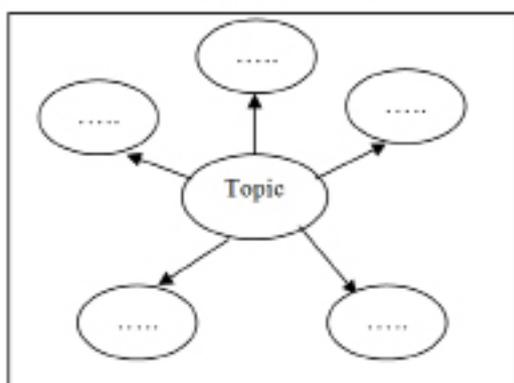
Action hypothesis of the implementation of clustering technique can improve the students' writing skill in descriptive text of the eighth graders of MTs Darul Ulum Purwoasri Sukosewu Bojonegoro in the academic year of 2012/2013.

## METHOD

This research belongs to Classroom Action Research (CAR) since it attempts to solve the problem faced by the most of students in a certain class. McNiff (1988: 2) says that action research is the name given to an increasingly popular movement in educational research. It encourages a teacher to be reflective of his own practice in order to enhance the quality of education for himself and his pupils. It is form of self-reflective enquiry that is now being used in school-based curriculum, professional development, school-improvement schemes, and so on, and it is actively involves teachers as participant in their own educational process. Therefore, in order to conduct an action research, researcher must have the ability to become self-reflective in solving the problems that he is dealing with.

This research consists of two cycles, and each cycle consists of four stages, namely planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (McNiff, 1988: 27). The population of this research is the

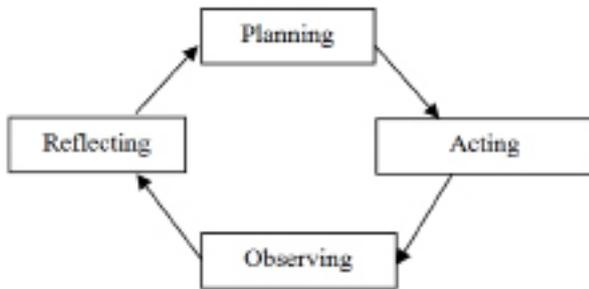
**Figure 1. Clustering Diagram**



eighth graders of MTs Darul Ulum Purwoasri Sukosewu Bojonegoro in the academic year of 2012/2013 which consists of 32 students.

The scheme of Action Research can be visually reflected as follows:

**Figure 2. The Scheme of Action Research**



Cycle I

In this cycle, the material is describing people. The researcher asked the students to describe their favorite actor/actress, football player, singer, etc. This cycle consists of two meetings and one test. The test was given after the students got the explanation from the researcher about the material.

In this stage, the researcher prepared the followings:

(a). Making lesson plan (teaching scenario);  
 (b). Preparing evaluation sheets; (c). Preparing teaching aids, such as: LCD, computer, power point, etc.

Acting stage is the implementation of all things prepared in the planning stage by the researcher. The material was about descriptive text with topic '*describing people*'. The technique used was clustering technique. The following is the steps done by the researcher in this stage:

Pre-writing (1). The teacher writes a theme on the whiteboard; (2). The teacher draws a sample of cluster, and asks the students to competitively complete the provided cluster; (3). The teacher gives the example of descriptive phrase based on cluster; (4). The teacher asks the students to make a cluster on their own.

Whilst-writing (1). The teacher asks the stu-

dents individually write an essay based on a certain theme; (2). The students try to make cluster based on the theme given by the teacher; (3). The students write an essay based on the cluster they have made.

Post-writing (1). The teacher asks the students if clustering technique helps them in writing; (2). The teacher evaluates the students' writing product.

The followings are the aspects that were observed by the researcher during the acting stage: (1). The number of students who came to the class; (2). The class situation when clustering technique was implemented; (3) The obstacles that the students faced during the class.

Reflection is the analysis of the results of observation and the result of test at the end of cycle. Reflection stage of the first cycle was done after acting stage and observation stage. The result of this reflection was used to know whether the problem faced by most of students was completely solved or not, if no, the researcher would conduct the second cycle.

In this study there were two kinds of data: qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data were collected by observation, interview and questionnaires. Observation was done when the teaching-learning-process took place, before the teacher used clustering technique to teach writing and after the teacher used clustering technique in teaching writing. It was to know the students' skill and the students' difficulties in writing. Then the observation was continued by focusing on the use of clustering technique in teaching writing. The second technique of collecting qualitative data was interview. It was done by the researcher by interviewing the teacher of the class after the teaching-learning-process to add the data. Then, it was continued by discussing every activity by the researcher and the teacher. The third technique of collecting data was giving the students questionnaire to know the use of clustering technique in teaching writing.

The quantitative data were collected by a test. The test was done to measure the students' writing skill which was obtained from writing

test before the teacher used clustering technique to teach writing (pre-test) and after the teacher used clustering technique to teach writing (post-test).

**Table 2 Technique of Collecting Data**

| No | Technique     | Target  | Purpose  | Data  |
|----|---------------|---|--|---|
| 1  | Observation   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Teaching and learning activity</li> <li>• Teacher</li> </ul> | To watch and record action   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field note</li> <li>• Teacher's diary</li> </ul> |
| 2  | Interview     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Collaborator</li> </ul>                                      | To know the participants' feeling in face-to face interaction                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview transcript</li> </ul>                  |
| 3  | Questionnaire | Students  | To get responses in non-face-to face interaction                               | Questionnaire scoring   |
| 4  | Test          | Students  | To get information about the current and previous mark, judgment and situation | Writing scores  |

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

This classroom action research of teaching writing using clustering technique was conducted in two cycles. Every cycle consisted of two meetings of 90 minutes

each. The first cycle introduced clustering technique in teaching writing and how students could use clustering technique in improving their writing skill.

The following is the summary of the results of pre-test, post-test (cycle 1 and cycle 2):

**Table 3. The Comparison of the Highest, the Lowest, and the Means of Pre-test and Post-test in Cycle 1 and 2.**

| Kinds of Scores | The Result of Writing Test in |                      |                      |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|                 | Pre-Test                      | Post-Test of Cycle 1 | Post-Test of Cycle 2 |
| Lowest          | 35                            | 43                   | 62                   |
| Highest         | 55                            | 81                   | 81                   |
| Mean            | 40.53                         | 50.75                | 64.65                |

### Discussion

From the table 3, it can be seen that there is a progress in the students' writing skill before the students are taught using clustering technique and after the students are taught using clustering technique. All students can pass the passing grade after the second cycle. It is 64.65. In this writing test, there are five main expected results. They include: (a) improvement of content; (b) improvement of organization; (c) improvement of vocabulary/diction; (d) improvement of language use/grammar; and (e) improvement of mechanics (spelling and punctuation).

The following is the result of the writing test based on each indicator:

**Table 4 Improvement of Content**

|             | Content  |         |         |
|-------------|----------|---------|---------|
|             | Pre-test | Cycle 1 | Cycle 2 |
| The Lowest  | 13       | 13      | 17      |
| The Highest | 15       | 22      | 22      |
| Mean        | 13.56    | 15.5    | 17.5    |

From the table above, it can be seen that there is improvement in content. The students who firstly can write descriptive text with *showing no knowledge of subject, non-substantive, not pertinent, or not enough to evaluate*, are now

able to write descriptive text with *limited knowledge of subject, little substance, and inadequate development of topic.*

**Table 5 Improvement of Organization**

|             | Organization |         |         |
|-------------|--------------|---------|---------|
|             | Pre-test     | Cycle 1 | Cycle 2 |
| The Lowest  | 7            | 8       | 13      |
| The Highest | 10           | 18      | 18      |
| Mean        | 8.09         | 10.59   | 14.09   |

From the table above, it can be seen that there is improvement in organization. The students who firstly can write descriptive text with *no communication, No organization, or not enough to evaluate, are now able to write descriptive text with somewhat choppy, loosely organized but main ideas stand out, limited support, and logical but incomplete sequencing.*

**Table 6. Improvement of Vocabulary/**

#### Diction

|             | Vocabulary/Diction |         |         |
|-------------|--------------------|---------|---------|
|             | Pre-test           | Cycle 1 | Cycle 2 |
| The Lowest  | 7                  | 9       | 13      |
| The Highest | 15                 | 18      | 18      |
| Mean        | 8.65               | 11      | 14      |

From the table above, it can be seen that there is improvement in vocabulary. The students who firstly can write descriptive text with *essentially translation, little knowledge of English vocabulary idioms, word form or not enough to evaluate, are now able to write descriptive text with adequate range, occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage but meaning not obscured.*

**Table 9. The Percentage of the Improvement in Pre-test and Post-test in Cycle 1 and 2.**

|            | The Result of Writing Test in |                      |                      |
|------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|            | Pre-Test                      | Post-Test of Cycle 1 | Post-Test of Cycle 2 |
| Mean       | 40.53                         | 50.75                | 64.65                |
| Percentage | 40.53%                        | 50.75%               | 64.65%               |

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the students' writing skill get improved from cycle to cycle. The mean score of pre-test is 40.53 and the mean score of post-test of cycle 1 is 50.75, it can be seen that the improvement

**Table 7 Improvement of Grammar**

|             | Language Use/Grammar |         |         |
|-------------|----------------------|---------|---------|
|             | Pre-test             | Cycle 1 | Cycle 2 |
| The Lowest  | 5                    | 9       | 14      |
| The Highest | 10                   | 18      | 18      |
| Mean        | 7.46                 | 9.50    | 14.12   |

From the table above, it can be seen that there is improvement in language use/grammar. The students who firstly can write descriptive text with *virtually no mastery of sentence constructions rules, dominated by errors, no communication or not enough to evaluate, are now able to write descriptive text with major problems in simple/complex constructions, frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions, and/fragments, run-ons, deletions, meaning confused/obscured.*

**Table 8 Improvement of Mechanics**

|             | Mechanics (Spelling and Punctuation) |         |         |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|
|             | Pre-test                             | Cycle 1 | Cycle 2 |
| The Lowest  | 3                                    | 4       | 5       |
| The Highest | 5                                    | 5       | 5       |
| Mean        | 3                                    | 4.15    | 5       |

From the table above, it can be seen that there is improvement in mechanics (spelling and punctuation). The students who firstly can write descriptive text with *frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, poor handwriting, meaning confused or obscured, are now able to demonstrate mastery of conventions, few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing.*

is 10.22%. While from the post-test of cycle 1 to the post-test of cycle 2 the improvement is 13.9%. And from the pre-test to the post-test of cycle 2 the improvement is 24.12%.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and the data analysis above, it can be concluded that the implementation of clustering technique can improve students' writing skill in descriptive text of the eighth graders of MTs Darul Ulum Purwasri Sukosewu Bojonegoro in the academic year of 2012/2013.

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