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## INCORPORATING FREE WRITING TECHNIQUE IN ENGLISH CLASS: A CLASS ROOM ACTION RESEARCH TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' WRITING ABILITY

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### Abstract

This classroom action research aims to assist students overcome their writing problems and enhance the quality of their writing using freewriting technique. Specifically, the research aimed to address two research questions: (1) Is there any improvement on students' writing quality through the implementation of free writing technique? (2) How is students' perception toward the implementation of free writing technique? The research was carried out at SMPN 48 Buton during the even semester of academic-year 2023/2024 with 25 participants. The study was conducted in two cycles, with three steps in each cycle: preparation, implementation, and observation. Writing tests were applied to collect data on students' writing performance, and students' perceptions toward the application of freewriting technique were gathered through interview. The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The results of the research shows that: (1) students' writing quality is successful to be improved in two cycles of the implementation of freewriting technique, and (2) in general, students regard that their writing quality improve since freewriting technique is motivated, and the technique is also effective to reduce their writing anxiety. This implies that freewriting technique is significantly effective to improve students' writing quality.

**Keywords:** Freewriting technique, Teaching Writing, Writing performance, EFL

## Abstrak

Penelitian tindakan kelas ini bertujuan untuk membantu mengatasi kesulitan siswa dalam menulis melalui penerapan teknik *freewriting*. Secara khusus, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjawab dua pertanyaan penelitian: (1) Apakah ada peningkatan kualitas tulisan siswa melalui penerapan teknik *freewriting*? (2) Bagaimana persepsi siswa terhadap penerapan teknik *freewriting*? Penelitian ini dilakukan di SMPN 48 Buton pada semester genap tahun ajaran 2023/2024 dengan peserta kelas VIII yang berjumlah 25 orang. Penelitian ini dilakukan dalam dua siklus, dengan tiga langkah dalam setiap siklus: persiapan, pelaksanaan, dan observasi. Tes menulis diterapkan untuk mengumpulkan data tentang kinerja menulis siswa, dan persepsi siswa terhadap penerapan teknik menulis bebas dikumpulkan melalui wawancara. Data dianalisis secara kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: (1) kualitas tulisan siswa berhasil ditingkatkan dalam dua siklus, dan (2) secara umum, siswa menganggap bahwa kualitas tulisan mereka meningkat karena teknik *freewriting* tersebut memotivasi juga efektif untuk mengurangi kecemasan menulis mereka.

Kata Kunci: *Freewriting* teknik,  
Pembelajaran menulis,  
Kemampuan menulis, EFL

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is widely seen as the most challenging skill to acquire. According to Elbow [1], expressing idea in writing is difficult and occasionally a debilitating task for most individuals. Whereas, Nunan [2] believes that Writing is a very complex cognitive activity because it requires the writer to show mastery of multiple variables at the same time. At the sentence level, these include vocabulary, punctuation, structure, and content; at the paragraph level, the writer must be able to organize and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and texts. This may be the cause of every problem that students will encounter when learning to write. In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), researchers (for examples, Demneri [3] and Alisha et. al [4]) agrees that when students lament how hard it is to write in EFL, they are referring to the challenge of expressing thoughts in a foreign language as well as the challenge of choosing the appropriate words and syntax. Byrne [5] mentions three causal factors of the difficulties in learning writing;

they are (1) linguistic problem (the issues brought on by regular language usage and writing conventions); (2) psychological problem (the issue stemmed from the fact that writing is a lonely activity in which we must compose our own work without the advantage of feedback or conversation); and (3) cognitive problems (the issue emerges from the necessity of mastering the language's written form and specific patterns that are either rarely or never utilized in conversation yet are crucial for clear written communication).

However, apart from the problem that writing is difficult, the skill can be learned. Gardner [6] states that writing is a skill that can be taught to everyone, and anyone who learns to write has the chance to become a professional writer because everyone has the capacity to write. Schneider [7] asserts that anyone who is motivated to learn writing and always practice writing seriously will be able to write well because the difficulties in writing are due to lack of exercise. Elbow [1] comments that the help and direction provided in the exercise and assignment have a direct impact on students' performance in learning to write since without work and struggle, one may not be able to produce a satisfactory writing.

Regarding the students' difficulties with EFL writing, the data indicates that the students of SMPN 48 Buton have similar issues. Meanwhile, as stipulated in the curriculum and English syllabus of junior secondary school, the students are expected to be able to write simple narrative and descriptive paragraph. However, the reality shows that most of the students have a lot of problems in writing. When they are assigned to write, their sentences are meaningless, and even some of them are unable to write anything at all on their worksheets. They struggle to put the thoughts in their heads into words and are unsure of how to do it. It is hypothesized that the students' difficulties in writing are close related to the lack of opportunities for them to explore and develop their own ideas in writing practice. White [8] asserted that in teaching writing the quality of students' written work can be effected by a number of variables. Probably, the students' problem in writing instead of the limited time duration (180 minutes in a week), it is also due to the teaching learning method implemented by the teacher. Ideally, in teaching writing, it is necessary to consider students' background, the nature of the writing itself, and students'

academic atmosphere. The teaching and learning method implemented in the classroom should create students to think critically, to reduce anxiety, and to involve actively in the teaching and learning process; the classroom atmosphere is not boring, monotonous, and dominated by the teacher's role [9]. One of the alternatives to improve students' writing quality is the application of freewriting technique. Some writers discuss the advantages of freewriting technique, and researcher on this technique found that it has several benefits, for example, promoting writing fluency and minimizing writing anxiety [10] and improve students' English proficiency [11].

As have been proved by some researchers that free writing is effective to promote writing fluency, the present study applies this technique to improve students' writing performance. This research aimed to address two research questions: (1) Is there any improvement on students' writing quality through the implementation of free writing technique? (2) How is students' perception toward the implementation of free writing technique?

## **Theoretical Background**

### *Teaching Writing*

Writing, as stated by Rivers and Temperley [12], is associated with the use of grammar (e. g, subject-verb agreement, tense, and the use of the article, syntax (word order), and mechanics (spelling, punctuation, and handwriting), and the organization of ideas coherently. Therefore, based on this definition, teaching writing should be focused on activities that allow the students to practice using the appropriate words, correct grammar and mechanics, and clear organization of idea.

Scott and Ytreberg [13] states that writing in a foreign language is a beneficial, necessary, important, and pleasurable aspect of the foreign language instruction. One of the reasons to include writing in a second or foreign language syllabus, according to Reimes [14], is that writing helps learners learn; it helps them have a chance to adventure with the language, to go beyond what they have learned. In addition, writing is used extensively in English language classes as a learning tool, such as to help students retain new language or to reinforce the acquisition of new

vocabulary or structure [3]. In this context, writing enables teachers to keep an eye on the students and identify issues they are having, as well as for students to observe their progress and receive comments from the teacher. This demonstrates that writing is a key component of language learning. Effective writing, in contrast to speech, necessitates several factors: a great deal of organization in the way ideas and information are developed; a high level of precision in the use of grammar and vocabulary to ensure that meaning is clear; the use of sophisticated grammatical devices to emphasize and focus; and a careful selection of vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and sentence structure to produce a style that is suitable for the subject matter and potential readers [6].

Heffernan and Lincoln [15] remark that writing is a communication instrument that needs to be intentionally learned. Writing and speaking, as described by Byrne [5], are both productive skills; however, the nature of the two types of learning these skills is relatively different. We learned to speak naturally and automatically to imitate the sound we hear from the people around us; however, we cannot learn to write automatically. Even we cannot write a word without any conscious effort of the mind and hand; we have to be taught how to form letters. We must be taught how to spell words correctly, put them in sentences, and use punctuation correctly.

Furthermore, Harmer [16] notes that the logical reason of teaching writing is to give students opportunity to sharpen their thought in language processing spontaneously. It brings benefits for students, for example: (1) as a good way to help develop students' ability of using vocabulary and grammar, increasing the ability of using language; (2) as an essential tool to support other skills because if a student has good writing ability, they can speak and read text more effectively; (3) as a way to approach modern information technology as well as the human knowledge. Rao [17] states that EFL writing is useful in two respects: first, it motivates students' thinking, organizing ideas, developing their ability to summarize, analyze and criticize. Second, it strengthens students' learning thinking and reflecting on English language.

Byrne [5] describes the pedagogical benefits of learning to write, namely: **first**, writing exercise gives students a variety of needs and different ways of learning. Some learners, especially those who are not easily to learn by

what he/she heard orally, feel better if he/she read and write in the language being studied. For this type of students, writing can help memory, if only because they feel more comfortable and relaxed; **second**, the writing students produced is a realization about their progress in learning the target language; **third**, exposure to foreign languages through more than one medium is more effective than just depend on one medium. Writing also gives diversity in the classroom activity, an interlude of oral activity, and increase the frequency of language contact through work that can be done outside of the classroom; **fourth**, writing often needed to formal and informal tests.

Additionally, Ferris and Hedgcock [18] state that the inclusion of writing in a second or foreign language curriculum is justified by the fact that writing is a learning aid, such as helping students retain new language or consolidating the acquisition of new vocabulary or structure. Drawing from the investigated theories, it can be inferred that teaching students to write involves procedures and exercises intended to help them develop the capacity to express ideas and concepts in written language.

#### *Free Writing Technique*

In the simplest terms, freewriting refers to the act of writing quickly for a set of time from ten to fifteen minutes, just putting down whatever is in mind, without pausing and worrying about what words to use, and without going back to modify what has been written because the goal of freewriting is the process, not the product. This technique has been viewed and used as a powerful technique for developing students' writing [1].

For the first time the idea of free writing was suggested by Brande in 1934. Later, Elbow his book in *Writing without Teacher* published 1971, developed it as a technique in writing exercise, and it has been popularized by Cameron through her book *The Artist's way* in 1992 [10]. According to the proponents of this technique, freewriting is a prewriting technique in which a person writes continuously for a set period of time without regard to spelling, grammar, or topic. Free writing is based on a presumption that while everybody has something to say and the ability to say it, however, the mental wellspring may be blocked by apathy, self-criticism, resentment, and anxiety about

deadlines, fear of failure or censure, or other forms of resistance. Cole [19] claims that by following the recognized guidelines for freewriting, a writer might get enough velocity to propel past obstacles and enter an unrestrained flow. It means that in doing freewriting a person produces raw, often unusable material, but helps him overcome blocks of apathy and self-criticism.

The essential rules of freewriting that are often formulated for the beginners or students, as suggested by Goldberg [20] are summarized in four points: (1) give a time limit, for example, write for one or ten or twenty minutes, and then stop; (2) keep hand moving until the time is up; do not pause to stare into space or to read what you have written; write quickly but not in a hurry; (3) pay no attention to grammar, spelling, punctuation, neatness, or style: nobody else needs to read what someone produce here; the correctness and quality of what we write do not matter; the act of writing does; (4) if someone gets off the topic or runs out of ideas, keep writing anyway; if necessary, write nonsense or whatever comes into our head, or simply scribble: anything to keep the hand moving; (5) if we feel bored or uncomfortable as we're writing, ask yourself what's bothering you and write about that; (6) when the time is up, look over what you have written, and mark passages that contain ideas or phrases that might be worth keeping or elaborating on in a subsequent free-writing session.

Furthermore, Elbow [1] elaborates several benefits of freewriting, especially for language class; *i.e.*, (1) freewriting makes writing easier by helping learner with the root psychological or existential difficulty in writing: finding words in his/her head and putting them down on a blank piece of paper; (2) freewriting is the best way to learn to separate the producing process from revising process; (3) free writing is a good way to warm up to make time effective and help student find words easily; (4) freewriting is a useful outlet of feelings; and (5) freewriting is one of the alternatives to improve learners' writing performance.

There are two types of free writing technique; they are: (1) unfocused free writing: the writer chooses the topic and is free to shift from subject to subject Often this is used to generate ideas for a piece of writing on any topic of the writer's choice; (2) focused free writing: the writer focuses attention on a specific subject, often in response to an assigned task. Focused free writing is often used in classrooms. Free

writing activities enable students to try out their language in a freer way. However, since the more language the children have, the easier it is to work on free writing activities [13].

## 2. METHODS

This research was designed using classroom action research with a cyclic approach. Each cycle, which is adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart [21], involves: planning, action, and reflection. The research was carried out SMPN 48 Buton, during even semester of academic-year 2023/2024 with 25 participants (all of the grade ninth students). They had two 90-minute sessions per week over a 12-week semester for this class.

Free writing activity was incorporated in English for 12 weeks. Before the technique was applied, a pre-test was given to students to measure their prior writing achievement. The quality of students' writing was measured using scoring rubric adopted from Ferris and Hedgcock [18], with the score range from 13 to 100.

This research was carried out into two cycles, and each cycle covers 5 sessions, which was implemented in 5 weeks. At the end of cycle 1 the test was held to measure whether the students have had significant improvement compared with the results of pre-test or not. The result of the computation indicated that the research needs to be continued to the cycle since it still does not meet the criteria of successfulness yet. To note that the criteria of the success is minimum 76 basis point of 0-100 scale. The students were required to write their idea in 300 to 400 words by choosing one of the topics prepared. The students have fifteen minutes to turn in their assignment.

There were two kinds of instruments used to collect data: writing test and interview guide. Writing test, which was consisted of (1) pre-test; (2) post-test of cycle 1; and (3) post-test of cycle 2 were given to measure students' prior writing achievement and their writing achievement after the application of cycle 1, and cycle 2. Throughout the tests, the students were required to write their opinion (in 300 to 400 words) by choosing one of the topics provided. They have 90 minutes to finish their product in which 15 minutes for freewriting on the topic, 40 minutes for writing their product, and 35 minutes re-

writing their final product. Meanwhile, the interview was conducted to dig up students' perception regarding to the application of free writing technique. The interview was held at the end of the application of the technique, and it was focused on digging up students' perception on the practicality and the advantages of the technique.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Results

#### a. The results of pre-test

As aforementioned, pre-test was carried out to measure students' prior writing achievements. It also functions as a blueprint to stipulate the criteria of the successfulness of the implementation of free writing technique. Table 2 presents the result of pre-test.

**Table1. Data Distribution of Students' Writing Achievement in Pre-test**

Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
≥ 81	Very Good	0	0
71-80	Good	1	4
61-70	Fair	4	16
46-60	Poor	17	48
≤ 45	Very Poor	3	12
Total		25	100
Average		47.66	

Table 1 reveals that the mean score achieved was 47.66. Most of the students (48 %) have poor writing achievement, 18 % have very poor category, and only 16 % of them (4 of 25 students) have fair category. There was only 4 % (1 student) has good category, and none of them falls in very good category. Cycle 1 was ended with the application of post-test where the students were required to write their response on one of the problems presented. The distribution of students' writing achievement in post-test of the cycle 1 in shown in Table 2.

Referring to the table, 8% of students fall into the good category, 60% fall into the fair category, 28% fall into the poor category, and 4% remain in the very poor category. There is a decrease in the number of people in the poor category as compared to Table 1. As indicated in Table 2, 48% of the students (17 students) fell into the poor category before the pre-test; however, following the implementation of cycle 1, this percentage dropped to 28% (7 students).

**Table 2. Data Distribution of Students' Writing Achievement in Post-test of Cycle 1**

Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
≥ 81	Very Good	0	0
71-80	Good	2	8
61-70	Fair	15	60
46-60	Poor	7	28
≤ 45	Very Poor	1	4
Total		25	100
Average		65.98	

In terms of very poor category, it was any decrease in number as well (from 12% to be 4%). In the meantime, the mean score increased from 47.66 to 65.98. When compared to the pre-test, the post-test results for cycle 1 showed that students' writing performance had improved somewhat, but it still fell short of the successful specified 75.00 basis point. Therefore, the implementation of the technique still needs to be continued to cycle 2.

The implementation of the cycle 2 was preceded by evaluation and reflection on cycle 1. It was conducted to find out any shortcomings regarding to the application of the technique that need to be revised. The revisions were focused on (1) time allocation for free writing was prolonged from 15 to be 20 minutes; (2) the length of writing was reduced from range of words 300 to 400 words to be 250 to 350 words; (3) feedback on students' writing add corrections and suggestions. Moreover, the results of post-test conducted at the end of cycle 2 indicated that the mean scored achieved was 77.21. Most of the students (60 %) have had fair category, and only a few of them (8 %) was still in poor category but none of them has very poor category.

Compared to Table 2 in terms of good category writing achievement, there is any significant increase in number from 8% to be 24%. It also proved that 8 % of the students have reached very good category which cannot be reached in cycle 1. Meanwhile, the average score raised up from 65.98 to be 76.21. The results of post-test on cycle 2 exposes that there were relatively any significant improvement compared to post-test 1, and it

already meet the indicator of the successfulness (75.00) basis point. Therefore, the implementation of free writing technique in improving students' writing performance is successful in two cycles.

**Table 3. Data Distribution of Students' Writing Achievement in Post-test of Cycle 2**

Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
≥ 81	Very Good	2	8
71-80	Good	6	24
61-70	Fair	15	60
46-60	Poor	2	8
≤ 45	Very Poor	0	0
Total		25	100
Average		76.21	

Further, students' perceptions of the use of free writing can be summed up in the following main points: (1) the technique is useful because it helps them focus their attention without feeling pressured; (2) it is effective because it allows them to explore their ideas without fear of making mistakes and receiving a poor grade; (3) it is enjoyable because they can freely express their ideas; (4) it is motivating because each student must write on their own; and (6) it is more practical because it can regularly train their writing skills.

### 3.2 Discussion

As stated previously, the objective of this research is to improve students' writing quality through the implementation of free writing technique. The results of the research showed that students' writing quality can be improved significantly in two cycles of the implementation of the technique. This is relevant to the results of the study conducted by Penn & Lim [11] who reported that as the students did freewriting, they were able to write longer and use more varied words over time. Li [22] also came to the conclusion that freewriting can be a beneficial tool for encouraging students to write continuously because it helps them better understand the nature and process of academic writing, become more conscious of their own writing strengths and weaknesses, and boost their confidence in academic writing. In accordance with this conclusion, Rosenberg [23] believes that freewriting is a useful strategy that can help students generate material to write

about.

Additionally, the advantage of freewriting, which can be a useful strategy for students to get words on paper quickly, is the reason why students' writing has improved. Insufficient English language skills can cause students to lose confidence, which can lead to writing anxiety. Freewriting can be a useful strategy to help students with their writing anxiety because it will make writing less difficult since words will flow more easily [1]. Some researchers reported that writing anxiety had a negative impact on grades of writing test ([24] and [25]).

The improvement of students' writing after two cycles of the implementation of freewriting technique is also related to the opportunity for students to do some exercises during the application of free writing technique. It means that freewriting exercise give the students more opportunity to do writing practice. As a warm-up activity, freewriting is designed to give students language, ideas, and encouragement before they settle down to the writing itself [13]. Vivanco [26] asserts that the best way to learn a language is by using it, so practice is better than theory.

Freewriting exercises can build students' writing habit. Many students either think or say that they cannot or do not want to write. This may be because of they lack confidence, think it is boring or believe they have 'nothing to say'. Freewriting activities involve them in writing process with enthusiasm. Gardner [6] asserts that the success of students in writing is directly related to exercises, direction, and motivation given by their teachers. It is impossible for someone to produce a good piece of writing without exercises, motivation, and struggle.

Finally, as part of the writing process, free writing can help improve the teaching composition by calling attention to planning and discovery prewriting is the stage before words emerge on paper; writing is the stage in which a product is being produced; and re-writing is a final reworking of that product [27].

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The main intention of this research is to overcome students' writing problems and to bring about changes on the quality of students'

writing through the implementation of freewriting technique. After two cycles of implementation of the technique, students' writing performance improve significantly. In other words, students' writing quality is successful to be improved in two cycles of implementation of freewriting technique. Freewriting technique is effective to improve students' writing quality due to the following reasons: (1) the technique is effective to reduce students' writing anxiety; (2) it facilitates learners to focus in exploring their idea; (3) the technique is motivated; and (4) it is a practice technique to train learners' writing skill regularly.

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