

FOUR SQUARE WRITING METHOD AS A TECHNIQUE TO TEACH DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

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Abstract: The objective of this study was to improve students' skill in writing descriptive text utilizing Four Square Writing Method (FSWM). Thirty students of Junior High School participated in this classroom action research which took place in two cycles. Two sorts of instruments were used in this study; observation sheet and writing test. While the first was utilized to obtain the data on students' responses and behavior, the latter was to achieve the data on students' writing improvement. The implementation of the method in the first cycle was able to increase students' mean score from 48.82 to 66.05. In the second cycle, more than 70% of the students successfully reached the score greater or equal to 72.95. This shows that the FSWM is one of alternative techniques in teaching descriptive text.

Keywords: *Four Square Writing Method (FSWM), descriptive texts, students' improvement*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching writing on descriptive text to junior high school students is necessary to construct students' English competence. Descriptive text in accordance with Oshima and Hogue (2007) is a kind of writing which tells how a person, a thing, or an animal looks, feels, smells, tastes, and/or sounds. Anderson and Anderson (2003) define descriptive writing as a kind of writing that describes a particular person, place or thing. Therefore, the students are highly encouraged to describe any objects in their surroundings for the communication purposes by learning this text.

The teaching of descriptive text is in agreement with the notion of the former Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia Muhammad Nuh, in his foreword for the book of *"Bahasa Inggris untuk SMP/MTs Kelas VII*. It is stated that English lessons are presented based on the genre of text (Kemendikbud, 2014). Kinds of writing genres are also necessary to be taught to the students in learning English. Miller (2011) argues that genre reflects a group of texts that all share a communicative purpose. Communicative purpose emerges the idea of being able to understand what other people say or write and of being able to be understood when one speaks or writes. Miller (2011) also points out that genre can activate the socio-cognitive schemata (background knowledge) of the students in the steps and language involved in the process. For example, if the students think about seeing an animal, they would probably think about the color, how the animal sounds, how it can walk, how many eyes and part of body they have, how they can survive or what other characteristics of the animal look like.

Additionally, the text can be about booking a ticket. The students are supposed to be able to call a travel agent, mention how many tickets they are willing to order, decide the schedule, choose the airline, pay the ticket, receive the invoice and say thank you for the booking. Another example can be of how to make something that needs certain procedures. For instance, in making an orange juice, some students will need water, blending machine, oranges, sugar, and other ingredients they favor. Of course, the students can have different process to make it. This, of course, depends on their schema. Simply said, the schema of one student is not same as the schema of other student. The contexts that the students face also vary. Consequently, the students need to share similar discourse structures and to employ language in similar ways for reaching their communicative purpose in mastering how to write a descriptive text.

As stipulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture in competence standard of teaching English in Junior High School (JHS), there are English basic competences (KDs) that should be

learned by the students. The basic competences in English for the students of Junior High School (JHS), in addition to attitude, are stated in Basic Competence (Kompetensi Dasar, KD 4.11 and KD 3.10). In KD 4.11 it is stated that by the end of the course the students can write short and simple descriptive text about people, animal, and thing. They are taught to keep students' aware of the social function, the structure, and the language features of the text which is suitable with its context. Therefore, students should have adequate background knowledge to attain the goal which is stated in KD 3.10.

KD 3.10 is a prerequisite for KD 4.11. It is about the knowledge of how to write descriptive text. KD 3.10 encapsulates the competence that should be mastered by the students. After learning the course, the students can comprehend the social function, the structure of text, and the language features of very short and simple descriptive text to describe people, animals, and things both in oral and in written form. Accordingly, the descriptive text is necessary for the students to be used in their daily communication.

However short and simple the descriptive text that the students write, it should meet the conditions of a good writing - a cohesive and coherent piece of writing. According to Jacobs, et al. (1981) a piece of writing covers content, organization, vocabulary, language usage, and mechanics. Content is the idea told in the writing. It can be about a person, an animal, or a thing. Organization is an aspect of writing that relates to how the idea is organized. It is about the unity and the coherence of the text. Vocabulary is related with the choice and the selection of words used in the text. Language usage deals with the use of grammar in the text. These vocabulary and language use as the two writing components are called lexicogrammar. Lexis provides information on what group of words used in descriptive text whereas grammar deals with information of what tense and what time indicators that will be used in descriptive text. In the meantime, mechanics refers to the use of small and capital letters, the use of punctuation such as full-stop, comma, colon, semi-colon,

etc. It is apparent then that the writing the students of JHS write should contain those components.

Unfortunately, JHS students in Indonesia still face some problems in writing either in generating ideas, in organizing ideas into a cohesive and coherent text. Furthermore, they tend to produce low quality text signified by the lack of grammaticality that suits the kind of text written, less appropriate dictions that are improper with their context, and incorrect mechanics in the form of the inaccuracy of using full-stop, comma, colon, semi-colon, etc. The studies conducted by a number of researchers so far show these unsatisfactory results. For example, the study conducted by Agustina and Junining (2015) reveal that the errors the students fell in four categories: (1) omission, (2) addition, (3) misformation, and (4) misordering.

Megaiab (2014) also finds that the weakest area in writing English faced by Indonesian EFL learners was grammatical aspect. Edi (2014), the other researcher, reveals that the students' difficulties in writing were word choice (vocabulary), arranging correct sentence (grammar), and organizing ideas. Zhu and Zhou (2012) discover that JHS the students had negative affective factors. For example, they were bored, anxious, hopeless, inhibited, and low self-confident in their English learning. Mardiyah, et. al. (2013) find that students' writing problems were the use of tense, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, vocabulary, and written English forms. Hidayati (2010) reports that determining the social function, the generic structure and grammatical function of the text has become the problem of students in writing. Desiari (2017), in her study on the interference of Indonesian grammar in writing English paragraph by the first year students of English department finds 167 (39.57%) inferences in form of inflection category, 84 (19.91%) interferences in form of preposition category, 49 (11.61%) inferences in form of article, 47 (11.14%) inferences in form of pronoun, 43 (10.19%) inferences in form of plurality, 18 (4.27%) inferences in form of copula 'be', 11

(2.61%) inferences in form of adjective, and 3 (0.75%) inferences in form of word order.

Specifically the research on students' ability in writing descriptive text mostly indicated unsatisfactory results too. For instance, on a study of the ability of the eighth grade students by Asmara (2017) discovering the following data that out of 28 students, none of the students (0.00%) was in excellent category, 13 students (46.4%) were in good category, 15 students (53.6%) were in fair category, and none of the students (0.00%) was in poor category. In other schools, Widyanasari (2017) conducts a research on the same area. In that study, out of 70 students, she finds 1 person (1.4%) attained very good category, 46 students (65.8%) got good category, 22 students (31.4%) achieved fair category, and 1 student (1.4%) were in poor category. In contrast, Jannah (2016) in her study on SMK students' ability in writing descriptive text discovers, out of 57 students, 47 persons (81.87%) were in good category.

Since the students had problems in almost all aspects of English, reaching the Minimum Criteria of Learning Mastery - KKM - in English, especially writing in English, must also be problematic for them. The same situation also occurred in the researcher's class. It is understood that writing is one of the productive aspects of language that necessitates EFL learners to integrate and implement all their knowledge and skills in English into their writing. That is why it is imperative for English teachers to take action to overcome this problem.

Some strategies, starting from the very basic up to the most complicated one, have been made by English teachers to overcome the problems. Rivers (as quoted by Muth'im, 2009) suggests some strategies that might help students to develop their writing skill are copying, reproducing, recombining, guided writing, and composing.

In copying strategy, the students are asked to copy the text as it is presented. In reproducing strategy, the students have to write the text they read or listen. In recombining strategy, the students are asked to combine the words/phrases in one part with the

words/phrases provided in other part. In guided strategy, the students are asked to write a new text based on the model shown. In the last strategy, i.e. composition, the students are asked to write their piece of writing freely in the sense that they have to be completely responsible for the content, the organization, the language use, the vocabulary and the mechanics of the text. In other words, the students can learn English in integrated skills between productive skill and receptive skill.

In higher education level, the quality of writing can also be improved by involving students in the process of editing their writing. This was what done by Winarto (2018) at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Kediri. In his study Winarto discovers that all elements of writing that comprise the quality of format, punctuation and mechanics, content, organization, and grammar and sentence structure were improved.

The other strategy that showed its effectiveness in enhancing writing ability is through idea listing technique (ILT). Miftah (2015) in his study using this technique finds that the implementation of ILT can enhance the students' ability in writing expository paragraph. In present study, the researcher also believe that Four Square Writing Method (FSWM) is effective in overcoming the problem in writing descriptive text. This method has been used in many schools in Indonesia and it has been proven that FSWM could improve students' writing skill as revealed by following researches. Wijastuti (2010) presents that FSWM is able to improve students' writing skill and situation of the classroom. Pratiwi (2014) points out that the use of FSWM can increase students' writing skill from 59.07 to 65.73 in cycle I and from 59.07 to 75.26 in cycle II. Sulistyorini (2013) also has found that FSWM had improved students' score in writing from 57.75 to 70.14 in cycle I and 78.5 in cycle II. Kurniawati (2013), though did not present specific scores, also claims that FSWM was effective to improve JHS students' writing skill.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Four Square Writing Method

FSWM is a way to learn to write for any grade or any subject (Gould, et. al., 2010). In writing descriptive text using FSWM, what is needed is to comprehend the concepts of topic and sub-topic clearly. Topic is the subject for discussion or study. Whereas sub-topics are parts and pieces of information which support the subject discussed. According to Gould & Gould (2005), to set up the basic FSWM, there should be a topic sentence. It is a middle rectangle that holds the writer's thesis statement and developed into three sentences. They are (1) the original topic sentence, (2) The "wrap-up" sentence, and (3) a "feeling" or "reflective" sentence. In other words, this method can assist the students to generate their ideas in writing any genre text type.

Rofi'ah and Ma'rifah (2017) have found out that this method can be functioned to activate and organize the students' schema which assists them to compose a text. They also highlighted that the use of FSWM through picture series in teaching narrative writing is highly recommended. It is the steps that can optimize students understanding on how to compose their writing in the right structure and this method can be applied for collaborative learning activities. The steps include how to categorize the relationship, label the topic sentence, provide clear details, write paragraph, summarize the text, and add transitional words that are necessary to let the text cohesive and coherent.

Principle of FSWM

According to Bartholomae, et. al. (2011), FSWM is a method that uses graphic organizer in helping students to organize facts, thoughts, and ideas. Gloria Houston (in Bartholomae, et. al., 2011) states that visual organizers help students to conceptualize, understand, and structure a piece of written discourse successfully. The main principles of FSWM are topic box, reasons, supporting details, vivid language, and conclusion. Topic box consists of a short

sentence or phrase stating what your paragraph or essay will be about. It should be short, concise and not a complete introduction. Reasons are directly related to the topic. They should be persuasive, short, concise, easily support the topic, strong as the content, and real (not an opinion). Supporting details must support the topic and give more explanation and description of the topic discussed. In the discussion of vivid language, the students are allowed to work on their word choice and develop voice. They must be able to paint a picture for their reader by words. They could use five senses, elaborate the writing, and express emotion by using adjectives. In conclusion, restate topic sentence, restate all reasons and leave the reader with something to think about. The design of FSWM can be seen in the following figure.

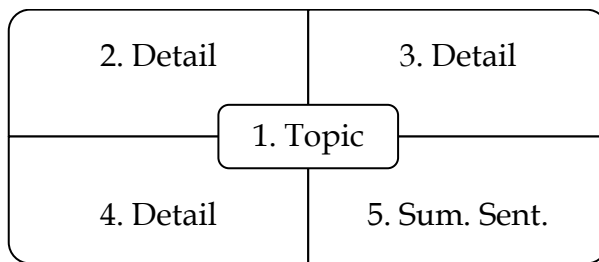


Figure 1 Design of FSWM

Remarks:

(2, 3, 4) are examples, details, or definitions of (1) topic

(5) wrap-up sentence includes all the ideas from the 4 square in a series sentence

Descriptive Text Writing

Writing is a productive process to express idea, opinion, and feeling in the written form. The activity of writing embeds various purposes and is directed to different audiences. According to Nunan (2003), writing is both a process and a product. While descriptive text is a text that describes a particular person, place or thing. Descriptive

text differs from other text in terms of its generic structure and language features. It is used to describe a place or thing using facts.

Wardiman, et. al. (2008) specified the generic structure of descriptive text into two parts: 1) identification and 2) description. In identification, the writer identifies the phenomenon to be described. Identification is like orientation in other genres of text. It is usually put in the first paragraph and brings us to know about the discussed topic. Identification usually answers the questions such as what the topic of the text is, and what the text about is. In description, the writer describes the parts of things, parts of physical appearance, qualities (degree of beauty, excellence, worth or value), and other characteristics (prominent aspects that are unique). It is put after identification or next paragraph of identification until final paragraph.

In language features, descriptive text employs certain nouns, simple present tense, noun phrase, adjectives, relative verb, thinking and feeling verb, action verb, adverbial, and figurative language style. This text describes a place or thing by using facts or in an imaginative way, begins with an introductory statement, systematically describes different aspects of the subject and may end with a concluding statement.

METHOD

In this research, a classroom action research (CAR) was implemented. By employing cluster random sampling technique, students in one class in an urban area in the city of Banjarmasin were chosen as the subject of the study. The reason why CAR was chosen in this research is it occurs through dynamic and complementary processes (Arikunto, 2008). It was carried out in four stages such as planning, action, observation, and reflection. The process of conducting classroom action research follows the steps suggested by Kemmis and McTaggart (as cited in Burns, 2010).

The research was conducted in cycle I and cycle II that used three meetings in every cycle. In the first cycle, students were taught

how to describe a place. The topic chosen was “school”. The topic was assumed to be a common and meaningful for the students since they could see, feel, and describe their own school. However, in order to be able to describe their school meaningfully, the students needed to have detail knowledge of the sub-topics of the school. For instance, they had to possess information about the formation of the buildings of the school, the functions of each building, the construction of the school, and so on.

So, in this study, the researchers explored their knowledge about the school. They were asked to list the aspects of topic they have known as the sub-topics by implementing FSWM. Based on this exploration, the students were asked to write a topic sentence about school. One of the examples of the topic sentence was “*I love my school*”. Then, they were asked to write a descriptive text by writing the details of the school, such as the location, the number of buildings, the number of rooms in each building, the function of the buildings, etc. In writing their text they had to bear in mind and implement their knowledge and information of the way to organize the topic, of the kind of language use which was appropriate for the genre, of kind of vocabulary which was suitable for the context, and mechanics that develop the topic, i.e. school.

In the second cycle, students were asked to describe about a person they know and adore very much. The topic was “*The Best Person in the World*”. The procedure was the same as the procedure in cycle I. First, the students were asked to mention the name of the best person they know in the world. Then, they were asked to make list anything related to the person as sub-topics, for example, his/her physical appearance, his/her family, his/her hobbies, etc. After that, they were asked to write a topic sentence about the person. Based on this information, they were asked to write some supporting sentences describing the person using the information of the sub-topics cohesively and coherently.

Techniques of data collection used by the researcher were observation and test. The data from observation were grouped based

on students' responses and behavior. They were taken as clue or indicator for students' understanding of the material. The data from test were used as a sign if teaching and learning process was successful or not.

Writing test was used for this research. The test was written based on the English syllabus for 8th grade and based on the material that had been taught in the class. To test the reliability of the test inter-rater reliability was used. There were two raters: the first rater was the English teacher in the school and the second rater was one of the researchers. The indicator of success was formulated as follows: "if 70% of students were able to attain the minimum passing grade, i.e. score 70 this means that the teaching and learning is considered successful. In this school the minimum passing grade was 70. 70% of students meant 21 students in the class have to obtain score 70 or more.

Additionally, CAR was done collaboratively. The collaborator in this research was a person who helped the researchers to collect the data. He was the English teacher who taught English in the eighth class. He was an observer, adviser, and corrector who guided the researchers in the research. He also helped the researchers in making lesson plans and gave feedback toward the teaching and learning process. One of the researchers became teacher teaching students by using FSWM.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Students' Writing Improvement

This research has shown that FSWM contributes to some significant improvements in student's descriptive writing skill. This progress can be seen in Table 1 which shows the result of Classroom Action Research (CAR) on the use of FSWM. Table 1 exemplifies that there is significant difference between the students' writing results in the first cycle and the second cycle.

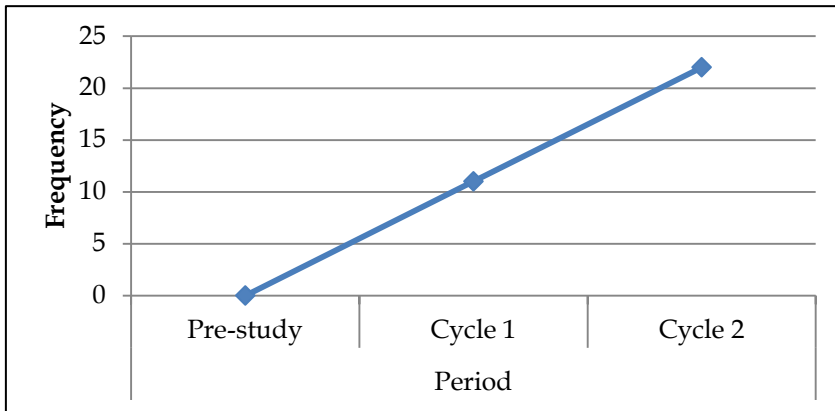
Table 1 the students' test result in pre-cycle, first cycle, and second cycle

Student	Name	Pre Cycle	1st Cycle	2nd Cycle
S1	AB	0.00	58.57	72.86
S2	AAP	48.57	65.71	65.72
S3	Alf	55.72	68.57	81.43
S4	ANP	54.29	60.00	81.43
S5	ABS	44.29	60.00	60.00
S6	DA	47.14	60.00	60.00
S7	DF	57.14	77.15	82.86
S8	DH	47.14	65.71	60.00
S9	DeA	54.29	64.29	70.00
S10	DO	58.57	68.57	80.00
S11	FRA	55.72	74.29	80.00
S12	FS	50.00	55.72	71.43
S13	FA	54.29	71.43	75.72
S14	Isn	54.29	74.29	77.14
S15	Kha	45.71	78.57	87.15
S16	MAR	30.00	51.43	61.43
S17	Mfa	27.15	40.00	60.00
S18	Mfi	28.57	65.71	70.00
S19	MYA	54.29	74.29	82.86
S20	MIK	40.00	61.43	67.15
S21	MRA	50.00	67.14	74.29
S22	MTR	55.72	78.57	81.43
S23	NF	42.86	70.00	77.14
S24	NI	51.43	71.43	75.72
S25	PA	54.29	65.72	75.72
S26	RU	50.00	71.39	74.29
S27	RS	55.72	70.00	68.57
S28	RF	48.57	67.14	74.29
S29	RSA	47.15	65.72	70.00
S30	SN	52.86	58.58	70.00
Average		48.82	66.05	72.95

In the first cycle, students have shown many improvements from 48.82 to 66.05 started before and after the given actions. The finding implies that some problems faced by the students in learning English in general such as grammatical aspect (Megaiab, 2014); vocabulary, grammar and organizing ideas (Edi, 2014); negative affective factors (Zhu & Zhou, 2012); the use of tense, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, vocabulary, and written English forms (Mardiyah, et. al., 2013); and determining the social function, the generic structure and grammatical function of the text (Hidayati, 2010) could gradually be minimized. Nevertheless, the improvement in score in cycle I has not reached the minimum passing grade in English yet, included writing descriptive text. Out of 30 students, there were only 11 or 36.67% of persons could obtain 70. Therefore, there must be some revisions for the action in the second cycle. Before proceeding cycle II, the researchers and the teacher evaluated and discussed about what to be creatively changed and developed for the next action.

In the second cycle, the students could fulfill the target. There were 22 students or 73.33% who reached the passing grade. They succeeded to achieve the passing grade, 70, in their last final writing. Even some students could accomplish more than 70. Their average score was higher than the previous one, 72.95. It can be concluded that this research succeeded in improving students' writing score. The result of this study is line with what Wijastuti (2010) has found that FSWM could improve students' writing skill, what Pratiwi (2014) shows that the use of FSWM could heighten students' writing skill from 59.07 to 65.73 in cycle I and to 75.26 in cycle II, what Sulistyorini (2013) discovered that FSWM had improved students' writing score from 57.75 to 70.14 in cycle I and 78.5 in cycle II, and what Kurniawati (2013) claims that FSWM was effective to improve JHS students' writing skill. The number of student who progressively accomplish development on writing is different between the cycle 1 and 2 that is exemplified in Table 2.

Table 2 frequency of students who reach passing grade score



This improvement happened because the information and the exposure the students obtained on various aspects of writing in general and especially in writing descriptive text helped them write better in descriptive text. This is proven by Jannah's (2016) study on Vocational high school students' ability in writing descriptive text discovered, out of 57 students, 46 person (81.87%) were in good category. This is in line with what Winarto (2018) found. The higher the students' level is and the more exposures the students are experienced in writing the better the quality of writing will be. His finding exemplifies that students' writing skills improved in all elements encompassing the quality of format, punctuation and mechanics, content, organization, and grammar and sentence structure.

Students' Responses

Reflected into the observer's checklist about the students' responses on the strategy of Four Square Writing Method (FSWM) in learning descriptive writing, the students demonstrate that they were enthusiastic with the learning and teaching process. FSWM can perpetuate the students' understanding on how to design and share their ideas to describe things and person. It also encourages them to construct a negotiation sense in the use of language item of

descriptive text. This can be observed from students' enthusiasm and motivation in the activities of recalling their prior knowledge, writing main ideas and elaborating supporting details.

In addition, it can be stated that the students consider FSWM meaningful strategy that can be employed in the English learning and teaching process. Before the students write individually, they are grouped by the teacher to plan and write descriptive text. In so doing, the students feel attracted with the collaborative activities applied in the classroom. In this practice, each group is requested to deliver feedback to the given assignment.

In the end of the students' writings, the teacher provides feedback so that the students can understand their lack and enhance their writing competence. The teacher's feedback is necessary because it can reinforce the students' comprehensions on how to develop writing technique, compose cohesively and coherently appropriate content, and create fruitful ideas. In this part, the students accept the teacher's feedbacks by writing descriptive text better in the cycle 2 than that of cycle 1.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that the implementation of Four Square Writing Method (FSWM) was significant to improve students' score in writing descriptive text - from 48.82 to 66.05 in cycle I to 72.95 in cycle II. The treatments in research facilitated the students to achieve the target. This means that by implementing FSWM not only can improve students' score in writing but also can reach the minimum passing grade stipulated by the school, that is, 70. However, the study was only carried out in one class by the researchers. It implies that the result was only valid for the students treated with FWSM.

It is suggested for teachers and students to apply FSWM as one of the teaching techniques to improve students' score in writing English, especially in teaching descriptive text. For future researchers, it is suggested to compare the results of teaching writing

using FSWM and the result of teaching writing using other teaching technique.

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