

**THE USE OF FOUR SQUARE WRITING METHOD TO IMPROVE
STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL (An Action Research at the Seventh Grade
of SMP Negeri 1 Banjarejo in Academic Year 2011/2012)**

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Abstract

This research aims at finding out whether and to what extent the use of four square writing method improves students' writing skill. Besides, this research also aims at identifying the students' motivation when four square writing method is implemented at seventh grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Banjarejo. The method used in this research is classroom action research. In collecting the data, the researcher used questionnaire, observation, interview and tests. The researcher conducted the tests before (pre-test) and after (post-test). The mean score of each test was compared to know the students improvements in writing skill. The research result shows the positive improvements in students' writing skill and students' motivation. The mean score of pre-test was 50.65, the post-test in cycle 1 was 70.10, and the post-test of cycle 2 was 73.42. On the other hand, there were positive improvements of students' motivation such as the students are more interested with the process of learning; the students pay attention to the teacher's explanation and teacher's instruction as the guide to do the task given; the students did not spent much time in starting writing; and the students enjoyed the writing activity.

Keyword: four square writing method, students' writing skill, students' motivation

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui apakah dan sejauh mana penggunaan *four square writing method* meningkatkan kemampuan menulis siswa dan mengidentifikasi motivasi siswa saat *four square writing method* diimplementasikan di kelas 7 SMP Negeri 1 Banjarejo. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah penelitian tindakan kelas. Dalam mengumpulkan data, peneliti menggunakan kuisioner, mengadakan pengamatan, wawancara dan tes. Peneliti mengadakan tes sebelum (*pre-test*) dan sesudah penelitian (*post-test*). Nilai rata-rata tiap tes dibandingkan untuk mengetahui peningkatan kemampuan menulis siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan ada peningkatan positif pada kemampuan menulis siswa dan motivasi siswa. Nilai rata-rata dari pre-tes adalah 50.65; post-tes siklus 1 adalah 70.10; dan post-tes siklus 2 adalah 73.42. Disamping itu, ada peningkatan positif dari motivasi siswa, yaitu, siswa lebih

tertarik dengan proses pembelajaran; siswa memperhatikan penjelasan guru dan instruksi guru sebagai fasilitator; siswa tidak menghabiskan banyak waktu saat mulai menulis; siswa menikmati kegiatan menulis.

Keyword: four square writing method, kemampuan menulis siswa, motivasi siswa.

Writing is a complicated skill. According to Harris (1993:10), writing is a process that occurs over a period of time, particularly if we take into account that sometimes extended periods of thinking that precede creating an initial draft. It is an ongoing process that needs time and energy to think. It also involves all language aspects that have been mastered. Besides, the influence from mother tongue and culture affects the students' comprehension. Therefore, writing skill seems to be difficult to master for the Junior High School students.

In order to find the students' problem of English class, the researcher conducted preliminary research at seventh grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Banjarejo. The preliminary research begins with delivering questionnaire to gather general information about the English class. After that, observation was done to know the situation of the teaching learning process, the students' behavior and motivation on the class, the method used in the class, the supported teaching aids, and the material. Then the researcher had some interview session with the teacher and some students. It aimed to find the cause of the problem or

activities happened on the class. Next, the researcher did a pre-test to find the information about the students' competence in writing. From those activities, it is found that students got difficulties in five aspects of writing, such as developing ideas, text organization, vocabulary mastery, language use and tense, and mechanics. It also identified the students' motivation as follows: 1) the students uninterested with the lesson 2) the students did not pay attention while teacher was delivering the material 3) the students spent longer time when they had to start writing 4) the students did not like writing activity.

Considering the problems appearing in the classroom, four square writing method is promoted. It is a method of teaching basic writing skill that is applicable across grade levels and curriculum areas. It can be applied when writing narrative, descriptive, expository or persuasive forms of writing (Gould and Gould, 2007). As a teaching writing method, four square writing method have advantages. Gould and Burke (2010: iv) state the advantages of using four square writing method in the class. Four square writing method will help the writers organize

and brainstorm in a hurry. It allows the writers to have time and attention in giving detail of writing. Besides, it boosts students' confidence when writing and makes them excited. Thus, it will improve the test scores of the students.

Four square writing method consists of several stages. The first stage of four square writing method is categorizing each square with the main idea. The second stage is labeling with summary sentence in the last square. The next stage is placing a topic sentence in the center of four square, then writing a sentence in each square based on the main idea that has been written before. After that, the students write each sentence on the square into a short paragraph. It is called an outline. The next step is adding more detail that is writing one sentence more in each square so that there are two sentences in it. Then the sixth stage is adding supporting detail. Here, the students make a list of related vocabulary in each square to explore the content of each square. The next stage is expanding the introduction with some detail information. The last stage is writing a complete wrap-up sentence and completing each square with the sentences using the vocabulary listed before. The students just re-write the sentences they made into paragraph from the squares in the right mechanics.

Every stage of four square writing method can cover the problems that appear in the writing class of seventh grade SMP N 1 Banjarejo. The first step of this method is writing a word in the centre of the square as a main topic or main idea and listing the word related to the topic on the square. It can help the students to express their idea. The second step is writing wrap-up sentence. Students write a summary/closing sentence. Then, write a complete sentence in every square. It helps students expand their vocabulary. After that, write the entire sentence out of the square as writing outline. It makes students easier in expanding the outline. The next steps put all the sentences into the square and add more detail as a sentence in every square. Then, adding supporting details. Here, the four square is added some supporting word related to the supporting topic. This step need vocabulary mastery of the students in choosing the word that will be written in four square. The last step is expanding the introduction and wrap-up sentences. Now, the students are taught how to write a wrap -up sentence than a feeling sentence and to abbreviate the supporting ideas into a word or phrase rather than write a complete sentence. After the step of four square method is completed, the students take their work out to a piece of paper, then they have to expand it to a good text.

From the strengths of four square writing method and the problems of students' writing skill, this research aims to find out whether and to what extent the use of four square writing method improve the students' writing skill and to identify the students' motivation when four square writing method is implemented in the writing class.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was carried out in SMP Negeri 1 Banjarejo. It was conducted from March 2012 – July 2012. It consisted of some stages such as pre-research, writing research proposal, planning the action, doing the action, analyzing the result and reporting the result. The subject of this research was the students at 7B of SMP Negeri 1 Banjarejo. There were 24 students who were observed their improvements of writing skill.

This research is an action research. Action research consists of four fundamental steps in spiraling process. Those steps are planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Planning is a stage where the question what, who, where, when, why, and how the research is conducted arise. It is also a stage where the researcher prepares the instrument used on the research such as lesson plan, items, blue print, etc. Moreover, acting is the implementation of the research. It is the essential stage where all the plans

are conducted on the class. Next, observing is a stage where the researcher observes all the activities and responses during the teaching and learning process. After that, reflecting is a stage where the researcher gives judgment of the strength and the weakness found during the research. This judgment can be a consideration to do a better plan for the next action.

There are two kinds of data are gathered namely qualitative data and quantitative data. Qualitative data are found from observation, questionnaire, and interview. Thus, they are analyzed by series of process such as assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretation, and reporting the outcome. Meanwhile, quantitative data are taken from test. They are analyzed by comparing the mean test of pre-test and post-test. By doing the process of analyzing, the improvement of the students' writing skill can be monitored.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A preliminary research had been conducted to find the students' writing skill and the students' motivation before the action. It brought the researcher implementing four square writing method to overcome the students' problems. The actions were held in two cycles. The first cycle consisted of three

meetings and the second cycle consisted of two meetings.

Preliminary Research

Preliminary research was conducted to find the students' problem and the cause of problems. It was done by delivering questionnaire, observation, interview, and pre-test. The results were five indicators of students' writing skill and four indicators of students' motivation. The indicators of students' writing skill were the students did not explore the topic given with the supporting detail; the students did not use proper cohesive device, the students had lack of vocabulary; the students did not use the proper grammatical rules especially linking verb and pronoun; and the students did not use the right mechanics. Meanwhile, the students' motivations were the students were uninterested with the lesson; the students did not pay attention on the teacher's explanation; the students spent longer time in writing; and the students did not like writing activity.

Cycle 1

Planning

After finding the problems and the causes of the students' writing skill, the researcher prepared the instruments used on the research. The lesson plan, the blue print, material, worksheet, and the test item were prepared well based on the students' characteristics and the

students' need. It was planned to have three meetings and the students were supposed to describe their favorite idol.

Acting

The first meeting was conducted to promote adjective words and filling the worksheet in labeling, categorizing, adding the details, summary sentences, and making outline. Here, the students learnt how to use words to describe people and how to make right sentences. Teacher showed them how to use linking verb properly in writing sentence. The second meeting was spent to continue filling the worksheet. The students were supposed to add some supporting details and wrap-up sentence related to the person they described. In the third meeting, the students were supposed to write a complete descriptive text based on the worksheet and the activities that had done before. Here, the teacher's role was as facilitator.

Observing

On the first meeting, the students seemed unhappy when they had to write. They did the activities when they were encouraged first. Besides, they did not know about the adjective words and how to use it in the sentence. They still did many mistakes on it while they practiced. Meanwhile, the classroom situation during the activities was very noisy.

On the second meeting, the students were more cautious with the teacher's explanation. They did the activities although in some occasion, they consulted their problem to the researcher. Sometimes, the researcher overwhelmed when some students gave some questions to him. It showed that the classroom interaction were better. The class was not as noisy before. On the third meeting, the students were scared when they were asked to make a descriptive text. They thought that writing was difficult, especially along text. They needed to be calmed and guided that the text they should make was based on the worksheet they did before. The students were afraid to make mistakes. But the researcher made them sure that mistakes were allowed and he would help them.

Reflecting

After being encouraged, the students showed their interest in writing. Although they still thought that writing is a difficult activity, they wanted to try to do it. They were helped by the graphic organizer in exploring the topic given, so they did not spend much time in thinking what they had to write. The enjoyable situation created a good interaction between the students and the researcher. The students were not shy in consulting the problem. They also paid attention of the researcher instruction in order to fill the worksheet successfully. The

students' motivation affected their achievements in writing. In this cycle, the students' writing skill was improved. They started to know how to explore the topic given. Their vocabulary was also increased. They started to write in a good order since they used the interesting graphic organizer. They knew how to use the linking verb and pronoun in writing a sentence though sometimes they still made mistakes. They also knew how to use mechanics properly. Those improvements were proved by the increasing mean score of the first post-test. The mean score of the post-test 1 was 70.10 or improved 19.45 points from the previous pre-test, which was only 50.10. A half of the students passed the minimum passing grade which was 65.

In the other hands, the incapability of the researcher in managing the class made the researcher difficult in giving the same attention to every student. He was also difficult in monitoring the progress of every student carefully. It caused the students' improvement were not optimal. The students still made mistakes in using linking verb. Some of them still failed in using proper adjective word. Therefore, it was planned to have a next cycle to overcome these problems.

Cycle 2

Revising Plan

To help the researcher easier in managing the class and monitoring

the students' progress, the students were divided into several group consisting four students in each group. The researcher pointed out more on the students' vocabulary mastery and grammatical features without neglecting the others aspect. In the cycle 2, the students were supposed to describe their favorite superhero in two meetings.

Acting

In the cycle 2, the students divided into groups. From this technique, teacher could guide the students in group and help them solving the problem. It also gave the students some space to discuss and share their knowledge. In the first meeting, the students filled the four square worksheet with their group with labeling, categorizing, adding the detail, wrote a summary sentence, and made a sentence in every square related to the label given. In the second meeting, the students continued their groups work. Here, they added more details, expanding every square with supporting details, and re-wrote the sentence in each square into a good text.

Observing

In the first meeting of cycle 2, the students were happy working in a group. They were involved in the group discussion. When they had some debate, they asked the

researcher to find the solution. Here, the students were more active since they share their knowledge with the others. The students who were still shy in asking the researcher could ask their friends. The researcher was also easier managing the class by moving from one group to the others. The students spent less time to categorize, label, add some details, and make outline when they worked in group. In the second meetings, the students could expand their outline into a good descriptive text. The researcher monitored the students' comprehension in each group and sometimes asked them to make a sentence. All the students had understood of the rules in making sentence using proper linking verb and pronoun.

Reflecting

In the cycle 2, the researcher found some improvements in students' writing skill after implementing FSWM in group. The students were motivated and interested in the teaching learning process. In group, the students could discuss the work together and share their knowledge. They also could divide the job and share the result. They were not afraid in making mistakes and were not ashamed to ask their friends about the problem they got. The interaction between students to the others and the students to the researcher increased. Therefore, the class seemed

enjoyable. Moreover, there were also some improvements in students' writing ability. Students could develop the main idea with some clear supporting details. Students used proper conjunction in linking the ideas so the text became cohesive and coherent. The students were able to use adjective word, pronoun, linking verb, and tense correctly. They also could use proper mechanics in their text.

The researcher was also easier in managing the class and monitoring the students' improvement. He could walk from one group to another and get involved in the group discussion. Furthermore, the test scores in cycle 2 showed the improvement result. The mean score of the post-test cycle 1 was 70.10, while the mean score of post-test in cycle 2 was 73.42.

Table 1. *The Students' Improvement on Writing*

Aspect	Co	TO	V	Lu	M	Total	Improvement
Pre-Test	15.75	11.08	10.79	10.67	2.35	50.65	
Post-Test 1	20.80	14.90	15.60	15.60	3.15	70.10	19.45
Post-Test 2	21.05	15.79	16.30	15.98	3.50	73.42	3.32

Referring those two cycles, it could be concluded that there were improvements in students' writing skill and the students' motivation toward the English class. The students could expand their ideas using some detail needed and those were well-organized using the right conjunction to show the relation within them. They could also explore their vocabulary and get wider. The sentence they wrote was appropriate with rules. It helped the reader to convey the meaning of the text they made. The mechanics were put on the right way. The students did not use their daily style in sending message through cell phone or social media.

In addition, there were no more sleepy boys or the useless chats behind the teacher back. All the students focused on the task given

and led them to the enjoyable teaching and learning process. The students were also not complaining anymore when they were asked to write a composition. Everyone seemed well-prepared so that there were no students who daydreamt in looking for some inspiration to write.

DISCUSSION

Four Square Writing Method can Improve the Students' Writing Skill

The implementation of four square writing method as teaching-learning method had improved the students' writing skill. The focuses of the research involve five aspects of writing skill: content of the text, organization of the idea, vocabulary mastery, language use, and mechanics. The findings show that

those aspects had a higher final achievement after the research.

The students' problem about vocabulary mastery was covered with the stages of four square writing method namely categorizing and adding supporting details. It is like a brainstorming activity but in the easiest way. As Gould and Gould said that by mapping out thoughts and information, writing becomes more focused and clear (2004: 61). As a basic teaching writing method, four square writing method which uses graphic organizer as the tool, empowers the students to write with more confidence as they become familiar and comfortable with the writing process. The graphic organizer itself brings the visual and kinesthetic aid to help the students focus their writing, provide the details, and enhance word choice (Enchanted learning, 2010). It also provides visual representations of concepts, knowledge, and ideas. Each square helps the idea does not interfere each other but still in a relation in order to make a coherence text.

Four square writing method is a good method for the students of SMP N 1 Banjarejo since it is applicable across grade level and curriculum areas that can also be applied to narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive forms of writing (Gould and Gould, 1999: 1). It looks suitable for junior of foreign language students who learn how to

describe something in particular way. Its simple design and its easy instruction make four square writing method is practically appropriate with the demand of the junior needs and characteristics.

Four Square Writing Method can Improve the Students' Motivation

By implementing the four square writing method, the students' motivation were better and improvement. They were focused in task given. Their attention was fully intended to the English class and its activity. Since the graphic organizer and the topic seemed interesting, they paid most of their attention in filling the worksheet provided. When writing, there were no students looked daydreamt as if they search something to write. This result is supported by Gould and Gould (1999:94) who states that four square helps students organize their thoughts and plans before they write. The students found that writing was no more both a scary and bored activity, they started to enjoy it. This is explained by Bugelski (1964: 159) that the teacher can control the students attention by giving stimulus, in this case can be an interesting task, that is going to the nervous system. Once the students' attention are caught, they can concentrate to any given materials and tasks. There are no more grumbled students in writing activity. They just make their attention as a mean to retain

information (Haberlandt, 1994: 65) while they are focusing their mind of something they do.

CONCLUSION

The research was aimed at improving students' writing skill by using four square writing method. Based on the result of implementation of the action, four conclusion can be drawn. First, Four Square Writing Method is an appropriate method in teaching English, especially teaching writing skill for Junior of foreign language students. Second, Four Square Writing Method is really enhancing the students' writing skill. The students practiced more in writing while they expanded their new vocabulary, learning some new rules in writing sentence, organized the text, gave some supporting ideas, and put the proper mechanics. Their score of each aspect in writing were just increased in every test occur. Third, Four Square Writing Method effectively improves students' motivation in learning process. This can be seen from the result of the observation during the research. Using Four Square Writing Method, the students showed great interest to be actively involved in writing class. They enthusiastically wrote what the researcher asked to write. They even more concentrated to the English class and paid full attention to the task given. Fourth, Four Square Writing Method significantly

improves the students' achievement. It is clearly showed by the increasing of the mean score. The mean score of the pre – test is 50.65 while the mean score of the post – test is 73.42.

Implication and Suggestion

Referring on the results of observation, questionnaire, test, and interview which were aimed to improve the students writing skill by using four square writing method, it can be concluded that teaching writing by using four square writing method can improve the students' writing skill and the students' motivation toward English class. In short, teachers who are willing to improve their class should use four square writing method as one of the method applied in their teaching since its visualization, its graphic organizer, and the steps of writing is really suitable for new learners of writing.

Based on the research findings, some suggestions to improve the students' writing skill are proposed to enhance the teaching and learning process. Teaching writing is not an easy work since lots of students think that writing is the most difficult skill. Consequently, teachers will face many obstacles during the teaching and learning process. One of method that they can use to solve the problem is four square writing method. Since it uses step by step in writing a text, four square writing method is helpful for

students in improving their writing ability. However, an instructional process will not be successful if the students are not maximally involved during it. That is why the students should motivate themselves to learn well and to be actively involved in the instructional process. The students should also practice by themselves at their home, not only at school. As proverb says that practice make perfect. Moreover, schools or other educational institutions should motivate their teachers or mentors to always learn about how to teach well. Being a teacher should not make someone stop learning. Schools and other educational institutions should insist the teacher to enrich him/herself by various ways of teaching. So their instructional processes will not be boring and the students will be happier in joining it.

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