

## IMPROVING STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL USING FOUR SQUARE WRITING METHOD

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### ***Abstract***

*The objectives of the research are: (1) To identify whether and to what extend Four Square Writing Method can improve students' writing skill; and (2) to analyze the class situation when Four Square Writing Method is implemented in writing class. The research is carried out at SMA Negeri 1 NgemplakBoyolali. The subject of the research is the students of class XI IPA 2 of SMA Negeri 1 NgemplakBoyolali in the academic year of 2012/2013. In collecting qualitative data in this research are collected using questionnaire, interview, observation, and photos and quantitative data are collected using tests. In analyzing the data, the researcher used qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data are analyzed using five stages, they are assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building meaning and interpretation and reporting the outcome. The research findings show that the use of Four Square Writing Method improves students' writing skill and classroom condition. It can be seen from their interest and motivation in learning English and writing mean score of pre-test 54 increased to 70.5 in post-test 1, and 74.8 in post-test 2.*

*Keyword: writing skill, Four Square Writing Method, classroom action research*

### ***Abstrak***

*Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah (1) mengidentifikasi sejauh mana penerapan metode Four Square Writing mampu meningkatkan kecakapan siswa dalam kemampuan menulis; (2) menganalisa situasi kelas ketika metode Four Square Writing diterapkan dalam pembelajaran menulis. Penelitian dilaksanakan di SMA Negeri 1 Ngemplak Boyolali. Subjek dari penelitian ini adalah siswa kelas XI IPA 2 SMA Negeri 1 Ngemplak Boyolali pada tahun ajaran 2012/2013. Untuk pengumpulan kualitatif data pada penelitian ini menggunakan kuisisioner, wawancara, pengamatan, dan*

*foto dan kuantitatif data menggunakan tes. Untuk menganalisa data, peneliti menggunakan kualitatif dan kuantitatif data. Kualitatif data dianalisis melalui lima tahap yakni mengumpulkan data, member kode pada data, membandingkan data, menginterpretasikan data, dan melaporkan hasil. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan metode Four Square Writing mampu meningkatkan ketrampilan siswa dalam menulis dan keadaan ruang kelas. Hal tersebut dapat dilihat dalam motivasi siswa dalam belajar bahasa Inggris, dan ada kenaikan nilai pre test 54 menjadi 70.5 pada post test 1 serta 74.8 pada post test 2.*

*Kata Kunci : kecakapan menulis, metode Four Square Writing, penelitian tindakan kelas*

## INTRODUCTION

English is one of compulsory lessons for the students in the school. In learning English there are four skills that have to be mastered by students, namely: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Based on *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan 2006* is learning writing in Senior High School which is aimed at making the students able to express ideas in the written form by using appropriate language variation fluently and accurately in interaction or monologue in the form of report, narrative, analytical exposition, spoof, and hortatory exposition.

Based on that curriculum, we can see the importance of writing instruction. Raimes in Reid (1993: 27) states that writing reinforces grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary. To make a good and readable writing, good and correct grammatical structure, idioms, and

vocabulary are important. It means, ideally in writing the students should be able to adjust the content with its title, organize a text to make it cohesive and coherent, use correct grammar, use correct vocabulary, and write a text with correct punctuation and capitalization. But in fact, most of students got difficulties in writing a text. This problem could be indicated that (a) the students were unable to find idea/content well; (b) the students were unable to organize a text to make it cohesive and coherent; (c) the students were unable to use correct grammar; (d) the students were unable to use correct vocabulary.

The problem above can be caused by the students themselves or the teacher. In writing instruction, most of the students felt bored, sometimes they were not interested in teacher's explanation, and other made clamour in the classroom by going to their friend's bench. Besides, this condition may occur because of the teacher was less

optimized the time to explain the indicator of writing.

Therefore, the researcher realizes that the problems should be solved by using appropriate approach in order to improve students' writing skill. Besides, the researcher also found that there are so many kinds of approaches of teaching writing such as *storytelling, guided writing, mind mapping, etc.* Based on the specific problems that faced by students above, the researcher believes that *Four Square Writing Method* is the most appropriate approach that can help students to solve the problems.

FSWM is a method of teaching basic writing skills that is applicable across grade levels and curriculum areas. Based on the definition above, it can be believed that FSWM can improve the basic writing skills of the students. This method published by Judith Gould and Evan Jay Gould in 1999.

There are eight steps of Four Square Writing Method based on Gould and Gould as follows:

1. Brainstorming three supporting ideas and writing a concluding sentence

In the first step, the students have to write down the topic in the centre box then write down the three supporting topics in the three squares and concluding of the support in the last square (the right lower square). Indirectly, the students are taught to

think the main idea of each paragraph from the opening to the concluding paragraph. For high school students, they have to write down the main idea and supporting idea in complete sentence. This step can improve skill of writing that is finding the idea or content.

2. 4 + 3 Adding supporting details

In the second step, the students have to add supporting detail in boxes 2, 3, and 4. In this step, all boxes will be "four square" independently. This step can improve writing skill of the students that is reinforcing the idea and making coherence between the paragraphs.

3. 4 + 3 + C Adding connecting words to provide transition

In the third step, the students have to add connecting words to provide transition between thoughts. In this step, the students are taught to think how to make the cohesion between sentences and paragraphs.

4. 4 + 3 + C + V Incorporating vivid language into writing

The fourth step is incorporating vivid language into writing. This step helps the student to develop personal writing style by using carefully chosen specific words to provide sensory details and imagery for the reader. The vivid languages are to develop the existing details. The selection of vocabulary forces the students to open their dictionary. This is one of ways to

improve the basic skill of writing that is mastering the vocabulary.

5. Write down the sentences in each square to be paragraph.

The fifth step is writing down the sentences in boxes 2, 3, and 4 to be paragraph (one box for one paragraph). In this step, the students improve the writing skill that is using correct grammar and mechanics.

6. Improving the initial paragraph

The sixth step is improving the initial paragraph. Improving the initial paragraph in the centre box of square can be done by writing down the first topic and wrap up sentence then followed by reflection, though provoking or personal feeling. This step, besides reflecting all details in the second, third, and fourth paragraph, it also improves the writing skills they are adjusting the content by the title and making the text cohesive and coherent.

7. Improving the final paragraph

The seventh step is developing concluding paragraph. There are two things in developing concluding: the wrap up sentence with connecting word and the reflective sentence, question, or exclamation.

8. Editing

The last step is editing the whole text. In this step, the students are not allowed to make mistake. This step is based on the last process of writing that is editing. Although it

takes many steps that the students have to do, the steps can be done in short time. By the teachers' help, the students can finish their text in less than two hours lesson with at least 5 paragraphs.

Considering the theory of writing and Four Square Writing Method above, the hypothesis of this study is that using Four Square Writing Method can improve students' writing ability of tenth grade students of SMAN 1 Ngemplak Boyolali.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The research method that used by researcher was classroom action research McNiff and Whitehead (2006: 7) that action research is a form of enquiry that enables practitioners everywhere to investigate and evaluate their work.

Further classroom action research consists of four essential moments. They are: planning, action, observation and reflection (Kemmis and McTaggart in Burn, 1984: 32). The process can be seen in the following procedures; (1) identifying the problem: the researcher used pre-test, classroom observation, interviewing the English teacher and the students in finding problems; (2) planning: the researcher prepared one lesson plan in each meeting. In the first, the researcher planned five meetings and the second cycle, there were three meetings; (3) action

implementation: in carrying out the action research, she implemented the lesson plan and deliberately all the things written in the lesson, (4) observation: the observation phase was conducted during the teaching learning activity in order to record the activities happened in the classroom, (5) reflection: after the implementation of the action, the researcher reflects critically on what has happened after teaching learning.

The techniques that used by the researcher during research were (1). observation: it observes to the interaction between teacher and students during teaching writing skill; (2) field notes: field notes functions to record the activities happened in the class; (3) photographs: the photographs are used to take a picture from students' activity during teaching learning activity; (4) interview: it uses to identify the problem and the source of the problem faced by the students in learning writing skill; 5) questionnaire: the researcher contributes questionnaire to the students to know the students' opinion and feeling during their learning writing skill; (6) test: the kind of test that used by researcher in this research was writing essay. It is given before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the action. In the pre-test, the students are asked to write the report text.

Further, the data were analyzed by qualitative and

quantitative ways. The qualitative data analyses were used to analyze the data that are taken during the teaching learning process. Further the data was analyzed by describing, investigating and evaluating the observation result, field notes, photographs, interview note and questionnaire result. The phases that used were constant comparative method as suggested by Burn (1984: 156-160). There are five components (1) assembling the data; (2) coding the data; (3) comparing the data; (4) building interpretation; (5) reporting the outcome.

Meanwhile, the quantitative approach was done by describing the tests results. The quantitative data analyses were used to analyze data from the result of pre and post test. It functions to compare the result of students' writing skill improvement before and after the action or the result of pre-test and post-test.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

The result of class observation showed that the students had the problems in writing a text because they learnt writing without using a good approach and treatment. The writer found some problems dealing with the eighth grade students' writing skill:

First, the students had difficulties in determining the idea.

The result of pre research showed that most of the eleventh grade students in class XI IPA 2 of SMANegeri1Ngemplak had the problem in determining both the main idea and supporting idea. Sometimes they wrote a paragraph with many main ideas and sometimes they wrote a paragraph without any main idea.

Second, the students had difficulties in organizing the idea; the text the students produced was still in unwell-organized text. It was difficult for them to write down their ideas in a well-organized written work. They did not know actually what they had to write in the beginning of writing itself while they had a very limited time to do their writing. Their ideas were not coherent, sometimes lost their idea and got stuck, so they could not continue their writing.

Third, the students had difficulties in using appropriate grammar. Most of students had the problem in using appropriate grammar and they did not understand how to use grammar correctly, especially in using tenses in sentences. It also became the barrier in getting the lesson.

Fourth, there were many students with limited vocabulary. The students did not really understand what the writer said and what the text meant. Therefore, they

sometimes use Indonesian-English word to overcome the vocabulary that they did not know.

Fifth, the students had difficulties in using correct spelling. They thought lightly in applying correct spelling. The students were unaware with their problems. Based on the writer's observation, the sources of this problem are the low habit of the students' in writing and writing.

Besides, the questionnaires and interview result showed that the students' attitude and motivation toward the English lesson especially writing was still low. They did not seem interested in joining the class; the problems might be caused by some factors. The students were not so interested in learning English especially writing. The writer did not give adequate time, models, and practices for the students to write. Writing got less attention from the writer. Besides, no media and creative techniques were used in exploring the students' skill in writing narrative text. Therefore, the action research was carried out in five meetings in cycle 1 including the post test-1, and three meetings in cycle 2 including the post-test 2. The objectives of the research are: (1) to identify whether and to what extent Four Square Writing Method can improve students' writing skill; and (2) to analyze the class situation

when Four Square Writing Method is implemented in writing class.

The students' writing skill must be improved and overcome by implementing the teaching method. Therefore, the researcher used FSWM as a method to improve the students' writing skill and the students' motivation toward English lesson especially in writing report text. The improvement of students' writing skill involved some aspects of writing, namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanism.

After analyzing the observation result and the test result in the second cycle, the writer found the students' progress in writing skill. The observation result showed that there were some improvements achieved after doing the action.

Dealing with the improvement of students writing skill, the FSWM stimulated the students to make report text easier because they can organize about the theme then write it down in a paper. The students were able to use simple present tense in sentences correctly and use appropriate vocabulary. It was shown by the students' exercises in their worksheet which had only fewer mistakes. The students' writing skill got improvement from the cycle 1. The test scores in cycle 2 showed the improvement result. The mean score of the pre-test was 54, while the mean score of the post-test in cycle 1 was 70.5 and the mean score of the post-test in cycle 2 was 74.8. For the detail, it can be read in the table 1.0 below.

**Table 1.0 Summary of Research Findings**

<b>Research Findings</b>	<b>Before Action Research</b>	<b>After Action Research</b>
Improvement of students' writing skill.	1. The students' writing skill was low. 2. They could not write a text with good idea, grammar, organization, vocabulary, and mechanic.	1. The students' writing skill was improved. 2. They could write a text with good idea, grammar, organization, vocabulary, and mechanic.
Improvement of students' writing achievement.	Pre-test The mean score of pre-test: 54 The highest score: 75 The lowest score: 37 The mean score of finding	1. Post-test 1 The mean score of post-test 1: 70.5 The highest score: 82 The lowest score: 61 2. Post-test 2

	content/idea: 53.5 The mean score of organizing the sentences and paragraph: 53.4 The mean score of using correct grammar: 50.6 The mean score of using correct vocabulary: 54.7 The mean score of using correct punctuation and capitalization: 75.5	The mean score of post-test 2: 74.8 The highest score: 86 The lowest score: 68
Improvement of writing class condition.	1. Students were not active in discussion. 2. The students did not have any brave to try writing. 3. The students were not responsible to their own writing assignment.	1. Students were active in discussion. 2. The students were confident in writing a text. 3. The students were responsible to their own writing assignment.

In the discussion, the researcher discusses those two results.

1. FSWM improves students' writing skill

a. FSWM improves students' skill in finding the idea/content

To the students who are not interested in writing, finding idea is one of hard activities. Therefore, in teaching writing, teacher should need strategy to make the students writing conveniently in the classroom. The strategy used in FSWM is brainstorming the idea by using the graphic. In the graphic, students can write their idea structurally. Gould (1999)

states that visual organizer help the students to conceptualize, understand, and structure a piece of written discourse successfully. Bartholomae, et al. (in [www.foursquarewriting.professionaldevelopment.mht](http://www.foursquarewriting.professionaldevelopment.mht)) state that a graphic organizer of FSWM used to help organize facts, though and ideas (a great prewriting tool).

b. FSWM improves the students' skill in organizing ideas to make it cohesive and coherent

One of the ways to organize the text is making order. FSWM is the method of writing that uses graphic

organizer as an outline. There is order in the graphic organizer of FSWM: the centre box is the box number 1, two upper boxes are the box number 2 and number 3, and two bottom boxes are the box number 4 and number 5. The number shows the order of paragraph. By giving number of the graphic, it will be easy for students to make classification of their writing. Houston in Gould (1999) states that visual organizers eliminate “jellyfish writing” and provide coherence and cohesiveness in a piece of writing.

The good organization of the text is inseparable with the unity of the text. To make the unity between paragraphs, it needs transition words which relate between the paragraphs. It can be seen that the third step of FSWM can also improve the students’ skill in organizing the text. The third step is adding transition word. Blass (1996: 159) states that you can also establish paragraph coherence by using sentence connector. Sentence connectors show relationships between ideas in different sentence in paragraph.

- c. FSWM improves students’ skill in using correct vocabulary

Learning writing cannot be separated from learning using vocabulary. For the students, the vocabularies of English are sometimes new words for them. The second and forth step of FSWM help the students to learn using correct vocabulary. It is started from the second step that is adding supporting details. In this step, the students are forced to find the supporting detail and they have to open their dictionary for seeking the vocabulary that they do not know. It also happens in the forth step of FSWM that is adding vivid language. This step helps students to improve the students’ kinaesthetic intelligence to find the word or vocabulary that is related to kinaesthetic. Gould (1999) states that the visual and kinaesthetic aid is employed to focus on writing, to provide detail, and to enhance word choice. In addition, Johns, et al. (2003) state that four square is a learning activity to develop and increase a student’s vocabulary knowledge (in [www.u-46.org/4sq-overview.pdf](http://www.u-46.org/4sq-overview.pdf)).

- d. FSWM improves the students’ skill in using correct grammar

Grammar is one of the problems for the students in writing a text. The difference

between Indonesian grammar and English grammar is the cause why it is not easy to understand and use. One of the ways to make the students keep learning grammar is by guiding them to arrange the words into sentence and then arrange sentences into paragraph. FSWM can improve the students' skill in using correct grammar. The fifth step of FSWM guides them to use correct grammar. The fifth step is writing down the words and sentences in the boxes of FSWM. In this step, the students will easily understand how to arrange the words into sentence and sentences into paragraph. It is because the students have completed the previous steps and understood what the idea of sentence that they will make. The idea of sentence that they will make is clearer after passing the previous steps. Gould (1999) states that students are familiar with the order of composition and the movement through the graphic of four square. In addition, Gould (1999) states that the focus of FSWM is not only delivering the ideas and enriching vocabulary but also guiding the students to make the sentences in correct tenses.

- e. FSWM improves the students' skill in using correct punctuation and capitalization

Punctuation and capitalization become a problem for the students nowadays. The last step of FSWM assists the students' problem in using correct punctuation and capitalization. The step is editing the entire text. In the editing, the students should edit the mechanic of the written, vocabulary, grammar, and the organization of sentences and paragraph. Langan (2000: 26) states that Editing is to edit-check for and correct-errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. The process of editing can be done with the friend to make sure the writing product. Schumm in Vaughn (1997: 409) states that there is a strategy to do peer editing which is called AOK strategy. Besides, Burke, et al. (2010) state that drafting stage in four square helps to eliminate common errors in spelling.

- 2. FSWM improves writing class condition

- a. FSWM improves students' activity and creativity in discussion.

During implementing FSWM, the students are being active in writing class. They are active in discussion.

Writing by using FSWM is new method for them so they needed to discuss the steps that they do not understand yet with their group. The students were more active and creative talking about the step of FSWM together with their group and tried to do those steps. Perkins (in <http://edmonschool.com/teachingwriting/foursquarewriting>) related to the goal and objective of using FSWM states that students will be creative in their writing.

- b. FSWM improves students' confidence

The second indicator of the improving students' motivation was the students were confident in writing text. By following the steps of FSWM, the students were confident to express their idea in writing. For the students, the steps in FSWM are simple and easily understood. The use of graphic organizer was also one reason why they wrote confidently. Bartholomae, et al. (in [www.foursquarewriting.professionaldevelopment.mht](http://www.foursquarewriting.professionaldevelopment.mht)) related to the benefits of using FSWM in writing instruction states that FSWM empowers students to write with confidence.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the research findings and discussion above, the researcher concluded that four square writing method was able to improve students' writing skill and students' attitude. Besides, the result can also answer the problem statement on the previous chapter. The problem statements are; Can and to what extend Four Square Writing Method improve the students' writing skill? And how is the class situation when Four Square Writing Method is implemented in the writing class?

From the first problem statement, the researcher concluded that the use of four square writing method in teaching in SMA N 1 Ngemplak Boyolali is able to improve students' writing skill. The result shows that (a) the students were able to find the idea; (b) the students were able to organize a text to make it cohesive and coherent; (c) the students were able to use correct grammar; (d) the students were able to use correct vocabulary; and (e) the students were able to write a text with correct punctuation and capitalization. The result of the students' writing skill achievement can be seen in the main score of each cycle.

From the second questions of problem statement, the researcher concluded that the use of four square

writing method is able to help students more active during teaching learning. The students are more critical about the text by giving some questions. They are not afraid to ask and give their opinion during teaching reading activity. Moreover, the students pay more attention when the researcher was explaining the material.

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