AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS: A STUDY OF THE FOUR-SQUARE WRITING APPROACH

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	The purpose of this study is to see if using the 4-square method improves the writing skills of IAI As'adiyah Sengkang's fifth-semester English students. A pre-experimental design was used in this study. The population of this study was IAI As'adiyah Sengkang's English education. The data was gathered using the pre-test and post-test methods. The findings of this study show that the 4-Square approach considerably improved the writing skills of IAI As'adiyah Sengkang's English education. This was demonstrated by the paired-sample t-test result, which revealed that the probability value (0.00) was less than the level of significance (0.05), showing a significant difference between the pre- and post-test findings. As a result, the 4-square technique helped pupils enhance their writing skills in terms of grammar, content, punctuation, and spelling.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are four basic abilities that English teachers should teach their pupils while teaching English as a foreign language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Broughton et al., 2002; Nation, 2008; Sadiku, 2015). Writing is considered the most difficult and sophisticated language skill to learn out of all of these (McNamara et al., 2010; Grabe & Zhang, 2013). It comprises a student's ability to express their beliefs or thoughts in writing in a clear and efficient manner. These skills can only be attained if the student masters some writing techniques, such as how to gather ideas for what he or she will write about, how to express them in a series of sentences, how to organize them chronologically and coherently, and how to review and revise the composition until it is well-developed.

The preceding explanations highlight the importance of English teachers paying more attention to their students' writing skills in order to assist them in completing their language acquisition. Writing as a communicative activity should be promoted and nourished throughout a language learner's academic career (Arnó-Macià & Rueda-Ramos, 2011; Ganapathy & Kaur, 2014). Teaching writing is a unique technique to reinforce learning and reinforce grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary (Zhou, 2009; Dewi, 2020) supports this claim. As a result, it is clear that writing is an important language reinforcing skill and a crucial talent because it is used to learn, discover, grow, and refine language ability. Students become more engaged with the target language by writing,

attempting to convey their thoughts, and continually using their eyes, hands, and brain as a unique technique to reinforce learning.

There are some elements that may lead children to believe that writing is difficult (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Schunk, 2003; Hebert et al., 2018). First, they have trouble gathering and structuring their thoughts into coherent paragraphs. Second, kids have little idea what to write about or how to begin writing. In fact, instead of freewriting, they spend too much time thinking about what they're going to write. Third, kids are apprehensive of making mistakes. Most students are more concerned with avoiding spelling, grammatical, and punctuation issues in their writing than with making their thoughts more alive. The most important part of writing a paragraph is how the writers can express themselves clearly through their writing. Spelling, grammar, and punctuation are all important parts of writing a paragraph, but the most important part is how the writers can express themselves clearly through their writing. Finally, most teachers prefer to teach in a traditional manner. In this situation, the teacher takes the lead in explaining everything, and the students' duty is limited to simply listening to what their teacher says.

The usage of graphic organizers is thought to be a viable option for students to overcome their writing difficulties, as numerous organizers have been shown to be successful in assisting students in writing. According to Beesley & Apthorp (2010); Hill & Miller (2013) that graphic or visual organizers help pupils organize their thoughts by stimulating and increasing brain activity. Graphic organizers also aid students in conceptualizing, understanding, and structuring a piece of written discourse, as well as providing coherence and consistency in their writing (DiTiberio & Jensen, 2018; Graham, 2019).

The four-square organizer is one of many types of graphic organizers that can be used to assist students in learning languages. The four-square organizer, which is made up of four squares that are connected to each other with another box in the middle, is a simple shape that can help pupils plan and organize their ideas or thoughts in writing. According to Gould et al. (2010), using a four-square organizer to teach basic writing abilities is an approach that can be used across grade levels and subject areas and can be used to write narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive literature. It is an organizational tool that will assist students in writing clear, orderly paragraphs and essays so that they may write in a methodical manner.

Literature Review

Written ability is the ability to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas to others through writing symbols in a way that other people or readers can understand (Hacker, 2018; Marcos et al., 2020). During the language learners' course study, writing as a communicative activity should be promoted and nurtured. Aside from that, writing is a production skill that focuses on comprehension. In this way, learners will be able to generate high-quality writing while also comprehending writing skills. The major idea conveyed in the topic sentence, supporting sentence, and conclusion sentence are all part of the literary art.

The most compelling argument to teach writing is that it is a fundamental language skill, equally as crucial as speaking, listening, and reading (Nejmaoui, 2019; Allagui, 2021). Writing is a skill that requires a lot of practice. It is the process of putting thoughts on paper in order to convert them into words, polish core concepts, and give them structure and coherence. The act of writing stimulates our thoughts and allows us to tap into information stored in our subconscious mind (Roelfsema et al., 2018). We want to tell a story with our ideas in composition.

One of the linguistic talents is writing, which is not a natural aptitude. A realistic attitude toward writing must be based on the notion that writing is a skill (Tavşanlı et al.,

2021; Yu & Liu, 2021). It's a skill like driving, typing, or cooking, and it can be learned just like any other. As a result, writing is a difficult activity that requires experience. Working hard is the key to producing competent writing for practically everyone.

Some students learn languages solely through oral means, but the majority of us gain significantly from seeing the language written down (Assouline, 2010, Ranta & Meckelborg, 2013). Language development appears to be aided by the actual process of writing (which is similar to the process of speaking). Some students have an exceptional ability to pick up the language just by looking and hearing. The last is writing as a skill, which is by far the most significant reason for teaching writing. Writing is a fundamental language skill, just like speaking, listening, and reading (Jacobs, 2014; Burns & Siegel., 2018). Students must be able to compose letters, put together written reports, respond to advertisements, and, increasingly, write using technological media.

Four square writing is a technique for teaching basic writing abilities that may be used to a variety of grade levels and subjects (Gould et al., 2010; Rofi'ah & Ma'rifah, 2018; Setiawati, 2019; Yunus et al., 2021). It's a simplified visual organizer for teaching pupils to write in the classroom. It can be used in narrative, descriptive, explanatory, persuasive, and expository paragraphs and essays. Prewriting and organizational abilities are taught using a four-square graphic organizer. This visual and kinesthetic tool assists students in concentrating on their writing, providing details, and improving word choice. Three supporting ideas or sentences go into three of the outside squares of the organizer, with the theme or topic sentence in the center. The organizer's final box is finished with a wrap-up sentence.

The Four-square approach is used to teach specific paragraphs in an essay (Brunn, 2002; Gould et al., 2010; Tijani & Ogbaje, 2013; Puspita, 2015; Febriadi, 2017). A rectangle is drawn with the width surpassing the height and divided into four smaller rectangles of equal size to employ this approach. In the center of the figure, a fifth rectangle is drawn, taking up some of the space in each of the four rectangles. This results in a total of five rectangles. In the center rectangle, the student composes a complete topic sentence. The student next develops the major topic's thesis by writing sentences in the lower-left, upper-left, and upper-right rectangles. In the lower-right rectangle, the student enters a summary phrase. The conclusion sentence expresses how the reader should feel about the subject.

As a result, the four-square method is defined as a writing method that employs a visual organizer in the form of four squares and follows a step-by-step procedure. This organizer will assist pupils in effectively composing their work by requiring them to outline the ideas or thoughts they intend to put on paper. There is a space in the middle of the board for pupils to place the topic sentence in addition to the four squares.

2. METHOD

This study used a pre-experimental design with a single group pre-test and post-test (Farooq et al., 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). A pre-test was used to assess the students' prior knowledge, followed by treatments and a post-test to determine the effects of the therapies. This study's instrument was a writing test that was used as both a pre-test and a post-test. Students were instructed to write two descriptive paragraphs on the topics of "my best buddy" and "my favorite public person" in this writing test. Before the therapies, the pre-test results were utilized to determine the students' capacity to compose descriptive paragraphs. The post-test scores were utilized to determine whether or not the children had improved following treatment.

The researcher used a pre-test to assess the students' prior knowledge of writing descriptive paragraphs before administering the treatments. The pupils were instructed to

write two detailed paragraphs about "my best buddy" and "my favorite public figure" in this section. The current researcher provided the pupils treatments for four meetings after delivering the pre-test. Following the completion of the treatment, the post-test was given. The instrument utilized for the post-test was the same as for the pre-test. The goal was to see if the treatment improved the pupils' writing abilities.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The frequency and percentage distribution, the mean score, and the standard deviation of the students' test results are all included in the descriptive statistics analysis of this study. The test of significance, on the other hand, was used in this study's inferential analysis to determine whether both the mean scores of the students' pre-test and post-test results were significantly different, indicating a significant improvement.

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the students' pre-test and post-test scores, which includes four components.

Table 1. Student Overall Writing Scores by Frequency and Percentage Distribution

No	Category	Range	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
			F	%	F	%
1	Very good	86-100	0	0	1	2.8
2	Good	71-85	0	0	7	58.3
3	Average	56-70	10	83.3	5	38.9
4	Poor	41-55	3	16.7	0	0
5	Very Poor	≤ 40	0	0	0	0
	Total		**13**	**100**	**13**	**100**

The table above demonstrates that the pupils' pre-test scores were solely divided into two categories: bad and average. Meanwhile, the pupils' post-test scores fell into three categories: average, good, and very good. The number of students identified as bad on the pre-test was 3 (16.7 percent), whereas the number of students classed as average was 10 (83.3 percent), which represented the majority of the pupils. On the other hand, there were 5 (38.9%) students in the average score category in the post-test, more than half of them (7 (58.3 percent) in the good score group, and one (2.8 percent) in the very good score category.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Content-Related Writing Scores by Students

No	Category	Score	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
			F	%	F	%
1	Very good	5	0	0	4	22.2
2	Good	4	7	51	7	58.3
3	Average	3	6	49	2	19.4
4	Poor	2	0	0	0	0
5	Very Poor	1	0	0	0	0
	Total		**13**	**100**	**13**	**100**

In terms of content, the students' pre-test scores were evenly distributed between two categories: average and good. Each group had seven students (51 percent), as shown in Table

2. The kids' post-test scores were in the top three groups. Two students (19.4%) were in the average score category, seven students (58.3%) were in the good score category, and four students (22.2%) were in the very good score category.

Table 3. The Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Students' Writing Scores for Grammar

No	Category	Score	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
			F	**%**	**F**	**%**
1	Very good	5	0	0	2	11.1
2	Good	4	4	25	5	41.7
3	Average	3	7	58.3	5	41.7
4	Poor	2	2	16.7	1	5.6
5	Very Poor	1	0	0	0	0
	Total		**13**	**100**	**13**	**100**

In terms of grammar, Table 3 displays the categories of the students' pre-test and post-test scores. The pupils' pre-test results were in the low group with 2 (16.7 percent), the average category with 7 (58.3 percent), and the good category with 4 (25 percent). There were 1 (5.6%) students in the bad score group in the post-test, 5 (41.7%) students in the average and good score categories, and 2 (11.1%) students in the very good score category.

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Spelling Scores in Students' Writing

No	Categori	Range	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
			F	**%**	**F**	**%**
1	Very good	5	0	0	0	0
2	Good	4	0	0	5	41.7
3	Average	3	7	55.6	7	55.6
4	Poor	2	6	44.4	1	2.8
5	Very Poor	1	0	0	0	0
	Total		**13**	**100**	**13**	**100**

The last aspect of the pupils' writing that was looked into was spelling, which is seen in Table 4. The pupils' pre-test results were in the bad category with 6 (44.4%) students and the average category with 7 (55.6%) students, or more than half. Meanwhile, the pupils' post-test scores were in the poor category, with one (2.8 percent) student scoring poorly.

The SPSS version 22 computer software was used to compute the results of the paired sample t-test. The p-value was 0.00 or less than the 0.05 level of significance. There is a considerable difference between the pupils' pre-test and post-test results, which can be deduced. In other words, the students' writing abilities improved greatly as a result of their higher post-test scores than their pre-test scores. As a result, the research's null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, but the alternative hypothesis (H1) is plausible.

The students had weak writing skills prior to getting the therapies, as evidenced by the results of their pre-test. The pupils then exhibited considerable growth over the course of the four meetings of the treatment, from the first to the last meeting. Each therapy meeting's teaching and learning approach was essentially the same. Each meeting's theme for the students in treatment was varied.

The researcher delivered the post-test after the treatment, which was completed in the manner described above. The result was better than the pre-test, as evidenced by the pupils' mean scores on both tests. This indicates that the Four-Square technique had a beneficial impact on the pupils' writing abilities. To demonstrate this statistically, the researcher used the SPSS software tool to compare the mean scores of the students' pre-test and post-test. The results of the t-test revealed that the pre-test and post-test scores were significantly different. As a result, the Four-Square approach considerably increased the writing skill of IAI As'adiyah Sengkang students in the fifth semester of English education. Several earlier studies and theories, such as (Gould et al., 2010; Nugroho et al., 2014; Agustiana, 2017; Rofi'ah & Ma'rifah, 2018; Lumenta et al., 2020; Yunus et al., 2021) are relevant and supported these findings.

Therefore, these findings can be utilized as a starting point or as a supplement to other research on writing skills utilizing the four-square method, particularly in the field of education.

4.   CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion in the previous chapter, the researcher concluded that the Four-Square approach considerably increased the writing skill of IAI As'adiyah Sengkang's fifth semester English education. This was demonstrated by the results of the paired-sample t-test computation, which revealed that the probability value was less than the level of significance suggesting a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test findings.

As a suggestion of the study's findings and implications, lecturers or teachers might use it as a reference in managing learning to improve students' unique talents, particularly writing skills. Further study should be conducted in a broader scope to ensure that the information gathered is more accurate and supports existing hypotheses.

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