

USING WORK IN PAIRS METHOD TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS IN A UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Maya Marsevani, Frisca Yeo

Universitas Internasional Batam, Batam, Indonesia

maya@uib.ac.id, 2061024.frisca@edu.id

Abstract

The method used was Classroom Action Research (CAR). By using this method, it might raise students' motivation in learning English especially to master language forms, structure and grammar. Most studies focused on improving students' English skills in high school level. Hence, the researchers planned to implement work in pairs strategy to improve students' writing skills. It focused on university students who had low motivation and lack of grammar while learning English, especially writing skills. Researchers formulated the research questions; How is work in pairs method be used to improve students' writing skills? Pre-test and the post-test 2 had improved from lacking to fair. It was proved that implementing the pair work technique is a positive approach to boost students' writing skills, particularly in the context of descriptive writing. The average score of students increased, and the teaching-learning process improved significantly. Work in pairs method was useful in assisting students in writing descriptive text. The researchers hope by publishing this article, it will be useful for teacher and learners on learning English by using this work in pairs method

Keywords: *Work in Pairs, Writing Skills, Classroom Action Research*

I INTRODUCTION

In this modern era, to be considered as a good English teacher, thus there four skills that is need to be mastered namely: writing, listening, speaking and reading (Salaxiddinovna, 2022). Among the four skills mentioned, it is said that writing is considered as a difficult skill to master by most students considering it has many linguistics aspects such as grammar and also vocabulary (Anh, 2019). It means that many students still have trouble in their writing skills. Iftanti (2016) believed that writing skills is frequently used in people's everyday lives either as an individual such as writing journals, applications, messages, etc or as a member of society such as in workplace.

Students who aren't strong writers might face challenges that slow down their academic progress, according to Moses & Mohamad (2019). This struggle doesn't just affect their grades but also influences their social and mental well-being. One approach to address these challenges is the utilization of pair work. According to Achmad & Yusuf (2014), the pair work method is a form of interaction commonly employed in language classes. This method has the potential to enhance students' motivation to learn English, particularly in mastering language forms, structure, and grammar. Dalisa & Apriliaswati (2015) also discovered that the pair work method can alleviate students' anxiety during English learning. It's important to note that working in pairs is a collaborative effort with a partner and should not be regarded as an individual assessment of each student's abilities. Problem-solving sessions in class are designed to make it easier for students to work in pairs. (Biju, 2019). Working with a variety of colleagues is rewarding and allows for the development of interpersonal skills and professionalism (Dargue et al., 2023).

In Marsevani and Habeebanisya (2022)'s, Zega and Hulu (2022)'s and Yulitrinisya and Narius (2018)'s studies, they conducted the research by using work in pairs to increase students' speaking ability in high school levels. The results showed the students had improvement in speaking skills. The students further had motivation, interest, confidence, and happiness in speaking class.

In addition, Rianti et al. (2022) conducted the study with the aim of assessing the impact of pair work activities on students' speaking anxiety and their speaking proficiency. From the study, it is showed that paired work is effective to help lower the students' anxiety in teaching and learning process than the conventional method where the students work individually. But it was proofed that the class' average has decrease between the score for the pre-test and post-test. Although it helped the students decrease their anxiety but it did not help them increase their grades.

However, in writing skills, Hiromori (2021) carried out research by using work pairs method to compare if two heads are better than one to measure the students' L2 writing task. From the research, it was found out that by using work in pairs method, there was no significant improvement and difference

between learning using work in pairs or individually. It means that not all of the skills had positive outcome while implementing this strategy.

As mentioned above, most studies focused on improving students' English skills in high school level. Hence, the researchers planned to implement work in pairs strategy to improve students' writing skills. It focused on university students who had low motivation and lack of grammar while learning English, especially writing skills. Researchers formulated the research questions; How is work in pairs method be used to improve students' writing skills? Following a roughly four-week observation, the researchers concluded that the students' writing skills remained below the expected standard. Additionally, the researchers believe that the students encounter challenges in structuring paragraphs and sentences appropriately.

II MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 METHODS

The method used is Classroom Action Research (CAR). Farhana et al. (2008) stated that CAR is action research whose application is in teaching and learning activities teaching activities in the classroom with the intention of improving the learning and teaching process, with the aim of increasing or improve learning practices to be more effective. The researchers chose CAR as the method for this research is because this action is aimed to improve learning practices in the classroom professionally and determined the quality of the research's results. This action research involves several stages, namely planning, pre-research, research and post-research (Nasir et al., 2014). Therefore, the researchers would like to use Classroom Action Research (CAR) as the method to improve their writing skills and solving their problems in writing. Students will be asked to write a descriptive text. The focus of the descriptive text is revolved around animals and tourists' attraction.

Before introducing the pair work method, a pre-test was used to assess the students' writing skills, and document analysis was performed to back up the observations and make them more accurate. Document analysis is a structured way of evaluating either printed or electronic documents by carefully examining them (Lei, 2018). Afterward, a pre-test was given to 13 students, where they had to write a descriptive text. In the classroom, both the teacher and students actively participated, with students asking questions about how to write a descriptive text.

2.2 PARTICIPANTS

The researchers conducted the research in one of the universities in Batam and the participants for the research is class of 2022 students majoring in English Language Education which includes 13 students in the class. Researchers decided to conduct this study at the university level because previous research primarily focused on evaluating the descriptive writing skills of junior high school and high school students. The students majoring in English Language Education also currently are learning about this type of text. The researchers had already observed and did a document analysis which is an exercise during teaching process and can conclude that the quality of writing is still very low.

2.3 INSTRUMENTS

The first stage before implementing Classroom Action Research (CAR) is identifying the problem. The problems are identified by using a pre-test assignment and observation. A pre-test implies the practice of taking tests before learning the information, rather than afterward. (Pan & Sana, 2021). The purpose of the pre-test was to assess the students' proficiency in writing skills. Next method is observation which is a method to observe people in their natural environment, there are various roles researchers can adopt (Kumar, 2022). It was held to know the behavior of the students during learning and teaching process. This method will let the researchers know the model of class management and the writing skills of students.

The researchers used some technique on collecting the data that concludes observations. Observation is to find out the number and condition of the students to be studied as a whole (Loilatu and Musyawir, 2020). In conclusion, the researchers can gather information about the effectiveness about the work in pairs method in teaching and learning process. Besides the method above, the researchers also used pre-test to measure the students' writing skills before implementing the strategy and a post-test to re-measure the students' writing skill after the researchers implemented the strategy.

2.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Conclusions were drawn by grouping students' descriptive writing scores based on predetermined score categories, ranging from very good (90-100), good (80-89), fair (75-79), lacking (66-74), and very lacking (<65). Researchers conducted an internship at one of the universities in Batam, specifically in a writing subject that included descriptive text. Based on observation carried by researchers, they noticed that students generally scored low in descriptive writing. Hence, researchers decided to improve students' writing skills.

Table 1. Students' Rubric Scores

Aspects	Score	Description	Category
Content - Topic - Details	90 – 100	The topic is clear and easy to understand, and the details are closely related to it.	Very Good
	80 – 89	The topic is complete and clear but the details almost relating to the topic.	Good
	75 - 79	The topic is complete and almost clear but not completely related to the topic.	Fair
	66 - 74	The topic is not really complete and not really clear. The details are not completely related to the topic.	Lacking
	<65	The topic is not complete and not clear. The details are not related to the topic.	Very Lacking
Organization - Identification - Description	90 – 100	The identifications is complete and the descriptions are arranged with proper connectives.	Very Good
	80 – 89	The identifications is complete but the descriptions are not quite arranged with proper connectives.	Good
	75 - 79	The identifications is almost complete but the descriptions are not quite arranged with proper connectives.	Fair
	66 - 74	The identifications is not complete and the descriptions arranged got some misuse of proper connectives.	Lacking
	<65	The identifications is not complete and the descriptions are arranged with misuse of proper connectives.	Very Lacking
Grammar - Tenses - Agreement	90 – 100	The grammar or agreement used is accurate	Very Good
	80 – 89	Very few grammatical or agreement inaccuracies.	Good
	75 - 79	Very few grammatical or agreement inaccuracies but does not affect the meaning.	Fair

Aspects	Score	Description	Category
	66 - 74	Numerous grammatical or agreement inaccuracies.	Lacking
	<65	Frequent grammatical or agreement inaccuracies.	Very Lacking
Vocabulary	90 – 100	Frequent grammatical or agreement accuracies.	Very Good
	80 – 89	Advanced choice of words and word forms.	Good
	75 - 79	Effective choice of words and word forms.	Fair
	66 - 74	Some vocabulary and word form misuses are present, but they do not alter the meaning.	Lacking
	<65	Limited range and confusing words and word forms.	Very Lacking
Mechanics - Spelling - Punctuation - Capitalization	90 – 100	Uses correct spelling, punctuation and capitalization	Very Good
	80 – 89	Occasional errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization	Good
	75 - 79	Many mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization occur frequently.	Fair
	66 - 74	Errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization are the predominant issues.	Lacking
	<65	Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization errors dominate the text.	Very Lacking

After identifying students' problems based on the rubric score in table 1, the researchers planned the next action to implement it in the next class. (a) Making lesson plan. The lesson plan explains in detail the learning process consisting of the material to be taught, method, time, place and student evaluation (Emiliasari & Jubaedah, 2019). Although it may seem difficult to arrange a lesson plan, teachers still need to take notice in making it in order to make an ideal lesson plan. (b) Preparing the materials that is needed to supply to the students. (c) Preparing assignments needed to work in pairs. Assignments are given to students to either evaluate or boost their learning and knowledge improvement through specific tasks. (Jeprianto et al., 2021). (d) Lastly, preparing post-test, this action will let us know whether this method improve the students' writing skill or not.

The third step is to implement the action. The researchers used work in pairs to conduct the writing activity. After implementing the action, the next step is to reflect on the result of the post-test. The researchers evaluated on the results and find out whether the method used has a positive impact or has any weaknesses on the students' writing skills. After evaluating the result, the researchers and teacher will revise the method based on the weaknesses. After revising the method, the teacher and researchers will use the revised method on the next meeting. Fourth, observing the action during implementation process in a field note. Lastly, reflect the result of the observation to find positive results and the

weaknesses of the strategy. If needed, do another step which is revising the strategy based on the weaknesses that is found and it can be implemented in the next cycle class.

The researchers gathered the data received from the observations that had been done before. To analyze the data, the researchers compared the scores from students' pre-test score before implementing the work in pairs methods in class with students' post-test scores after implementing work in pairs method in class. The scores collected were analyzed, calculated and compared to find any changes of improvement in the students' writing skill. A writing can be considered as a good writing must be scored above 75%. The researchers also set the standard of success in class is 80%.

Scores from the pre-tests of the students were summed then divided by the number of students in the class or from the number the participants and times it by 100 to make it into a percentage variable. The score that was calculated earlier will be the average score for the pre-test. Next, the researchers did the same calculation for the students' post-test. It will be calculated after implementing the work in pairs method. The average percentage score of the pre-test and post-test were compared and see if there are any improvement while implementing work in pairs strategy in class.

Formula 1 serves as a tool for researchers and readers to see if the goals set by researchers have been achieved successfully. First, we need to identify the number of students who attained the minimum score on both the pre-test and post-test. Next, we determine the number of students who experienced a score improvement in the post-test, as well as those who has decreased score during post-test. Using these findings, we calculate the ratio of students who achieved the minimum score in both tests by dividing it by the sum of students meeting the minimum score on both tests, students with an increased post-test score who didn't reach the minimum score, and students with a decreased post-test score. This calculation resulted in a decimal result, which is then converted to a percentage by multiplying it by 100.

Formula 1. Formula to determine the percentage of students who achieved the standard of success or number of students who improved but did not reach the minimum score or number of students who scored has decreased during post-test

$$\frac{A \text{ or } B \text{ or } C}{A + B + C} = \quad \times 100 = \quad \%$$

- A : Number of students who reached the minimum score on both from pre-test and post-test
 B : Number of students who improved but did not reach the minimum score
 C : Number of students who scored has decreased during post-test

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting an observation of approximately four weeks, the researchers assessed that the writing skills of the students were still not up to par. The researchers also think that the students have difficulties in ranging a certain paragraph and sentence. Despite the time spent monitoring the students' progress, their writing ability remained substandard according to the researchers' evaluation. Based on the researchers' observations, the students encounter difficulties in expressing their own ideas in writing. Their vocabulary and grammar skills are insufficient, and they tend to use them incorrectly. Alisha et al., (2019) stated that the biggest challenge for students during the writing process is their limited vocabulary and lack of grammatical mastery. This poses difficulties in generating ideas, as inadequate vocabulary mastery creates confusion in expressing their thoughts. Students also face hesitation while choosing words, and often need to refer to dictionaries while writing in English.

Even though the students had limited writing skills, they were still enthusiastic and engaged in the learning process. The process of implementing work in pairs method to improve the students' writing is conducted by writing a descriptive text. The research findings are displayed according to the assessed aspects, and the results of the pre-test are shown in the table below.

Table 2. Students' Pre-Test Score

Aspects	Pre-Test Score	Category
Content	68,58	Lacking
Organization	69,91	Lacking
Grammar	67,58	Lacking
Vocabulary	65,33	Lacking
Mechanics	72,41	Lacking
Average	68,76	Lacking

From table 2, it displays that the pre-test's average score is 68.76, which is aligned with the rubric score established by the researchers to evaluate the students. Based on this average score, the researchers can infer that the students' writing proficiency level is still lacking, which was previously stated as 80% being the class success standard. For the first cycle, the researchers employed a "work in pairs" approach, where students teamed up to complete a task or activity.

During the initial stage of implementing the "work in pairs" methodology, the researchers refrained from immediately directing the students to commence writing. Instead, a comprehensive introduction was provided on the subject matter of crafting a well-written descriptive text that they would eventually compose. Subsequent to the introduction, a Q&A session was organized to encourage the students to ask any questions or clarify any doubts they had regarding the task.

The pairs were then assigned using a random name picker to implement the "work in pairs" method. The first cycle was centred on tourists' attraction as the theme, and each student was tasked with describing the tourists' attraction that they have selected, focusing on its features into a descriptive text. Participants are free to describe whatever they want. Researchers implemented this to ensure that the assessment of participants' writing remains unbiased by predetermined descriptive themes. The atmosphere in the classroom was filled with liveliness and enthusiasm, with the students displaying a high level of energy and engagement.

Table 3. Students' Pre-Test and Post-Test 1 scores

Aspects	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score 1	Category	Improvement
Content	68,58	70,66	Lacking	2,08
Organization	69,91	71,83	Lacking	1,92
Grammar	67,58	73	Lacking	5,42
Vocabulary	65,33	72,5	Lacking	7,17
Mechanics	72,41	79,16	Fair	6,75
Average	68,76	73,43	Lacking	4,67

Based on table 3, it can be seen that the average score achieved in the pre-test is 68.76%, while the average score in the first post-test is 73.43% which is still lacking. Despite not meeting the researchers' standard of success, there was still a noticeable improvement. Wahyudi (2016) stated that it is important to define what success means in learning English to understand how learners differ in their approach to learning. However, this definition should not be used to evaluate individual characteristics, but to gain a more profound insight into their learning style preferences. The average improvement observed in the scores between the pre-test and post-test was 4.67%. This suggests that the participants made progress over the course of the study, as there was a measurable increase in their performance.

Table 4. Students' Pre-Test, Post-Test 1 & 2 scores

Aspects	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score 1	Post- Test Score 2	Category	Improvement
Content	68,58	70,66	76,6	Fair	5,94
Organization	69,91	71,83	78,8	Fair	6,97
Grammar	67,58	73	74,9	Lacking	1,9
Vocabulary	65,33	72,5	82	Good	9,5
Mechanics	72,41	79,16	81	Good	1,84
Average	68,76	73,43	78,66	Fair	5,23

From table 4, there was a greater improvement in student performance following by implementing the second post-test compared to the first. The average score of the first post-test is 73,43%. Whereas the second post-test has the average score of 78,66% which comes in the category of fair. From the table we can see that the students made progress in their writing skills, with an average improvement of 5.23% between the two tests. This improvement can be made by the researchers in the work in pairs method, by changing the selection of new pairs for the second post-test. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of the work in pairs method can effectively enhance students' writing abilities. Despite not reaching the standard of success set by the researchers, the student has shown a significant improvement. Although the students have not attained the success standard set by the researchers, the progress they are making is still satisfied by the researchers.

Table 5. Students' Test Category

Average	Very Lacking	Lacking	Fair	Good	Very Good
Pre-test		✓			
Post-test 1		✓			
Post-test 2			✓		

The research clearly indicates that the work in pairs method implemented in the writing class is effective in enhancing students' writing skills. This is evident from the improvements observed in various aspects of writing, this includes proficiency in composing descriptive text, structuring content, using vocabulary, and applying grammar and mechanics. (Wulandari, 2012). Pre-testing involves taking tests before learning new information, whereas post-testing involves taking tests after studying the information (Pan & Sana, 2021). From the table above, the pre-test category was lacking. While the post-test 1 category remained lacking, it shows some improvement. In the post-test 2, however, the category has improved to a fair level. In the pre-test stage, the students were asked to write a descriptive text independently. On the other hand, in the first post-test and second post-test, the students were asked to write a descriptive text in collaboration with each other utilizing the pair work technique, which required them to work together in pairs.

In table 5 also demonstrate that the category between pre-test and the post-test 2 has improved from lacking to fair. Based on table 5, it is proved that by implementing the pair work technique is a positive approach to boost students' writing skills, particularly in the context of descriptive writing. The category "fair" is associated with a group that is deemed insufficient in enhancing students' writing skills. This aligns with (Anggraini, 2018)'s findings, which indicate that the method can enhance students' writing abilities, but it has yet to attain a satisfactory level.

The enhancement of writing skills can be evaluated by examining the appropriate use of grammar in sentences or complete paragraphs. This is evident from how students arrange words and phrases in a well-structured manner (Hasby & Sugianto, 2021). The way in which students arrange sentences coherently reflects this improvement (Saeed & Ghazali, 2016).

The collection of data in a particular educational environment is known as observation. It is an extensively used method of gathering information, and the researcher has the flexibility to adopt

different roles (Rahayu, 2015). The researchers have carried out observation for approximately four weeks. Based on the researchers' observations, the students encounter difficulties in expressing their own ideas in writing. Their vocabulary and grammar skills are insufficient, and they tend to use them incorrectly. The researchers also think that the students have difficulties in ranging a certain paragraph and sentence.

Through document analysis, the researchers discovered that a majority of the students struggle with grammar. The table reveals that grammar receives the lowest score compared to vocabulary, organization, mechanics, and content. The students frequently encounter issues with grammar, particularly regarding verb tenses.

Insufficient linguistic proficiency, including grammar, is a primary challenge that English language learners encounter in their writing, as stated in the research conducted by (Fareed et al., 2016), which is the same problem faced by the university students in writing descriptive texts. In addition, it was discovered that the arrangement of words was also unsuitable, resulting in challenges in conveying the intended meaning. Lack of proficiency in language, particularly in grammar was also found as one of the problems faced by university students in writing descriptive text.

The study demonstrated that working in pairs was an effective approach to enhance students' writing skills during the teaching and learning process. The average score for the pre-test was 68.76%, which was still in the lacking category. The students had previously expressed their concern regarding their inadequate writing skills, citing issues such as grammatical errors and limited vocabulary knowledge. This research validates their apprehensions.

The average score for the final post-test was 78.66%, indicating a 9.9% increase. Working together on assignments allowed students to improve their writing by refining their techniques. Moreover, it can enable students to practice writing (Kazemian et al., 2021). This finding is consistent with the research conducted by (Anggraini et al., 2020), which highlighted the usefulness of working together in improving the strengths of all group members to attain their objectives. (Fajriah et al., 2019) acknowledge that in language classes, work in pairs in learning can enhance students' self-confidence, boost their opportunities to speak, and stimulate their drive by establishing a supportive environment for language practice. The achievement of enhancing students' writing abilities corresponds with (Tama et al., n.d.) in which they also implemented the approach of pairing students to enhance their writing skills.

The category "fair" is associated with a group that is deemed insufficient in enhancing students' writing skills. This aligns with (Anggraini, 2018)'s findings, which indicate that the method can enhance students' writing abilities, but it has yet to attain a satisfactory level. (Rahmawati, 2017) has also carried out a classroom action research study titled "Think Pair Share: A Technique to Improve Students' Writing Proficiency," and the outcomes indicated that by implementing working together technique helps the students in generating ideas, recognizing critical vocabulary, and recalling essential grammar rules.

IV CONCLUSION

The study has provided insights into how we can determine the effectiveness of utilizing the pair work approach to enhance students' writing proficiency. Through this collaborative technique, students can elevate their grasp on various aspects of writing, such as grammar, vocabulary, content, organization, and mechanics, particularly in creating descriptive texts. Past research has also suggested that this method fosters a sense of collaboration among students.

Previous research has explored various strategies for enhancing students' writing skills. However, the researchers personally recommend for the implementation of work in pair method as an effective approach in the teaching and learning process. The researchers' investigation demonstrated that implementing the work in pair method could elevate students' writing abilities from lacking to fair levels.

Based on the previous chapter, it can be concluded that: (1) Work in pair method is an effective method for enhancing students' descriptive writing skills, which was verified by the outcomes of the research above. (2) The classroom action research comprised three cycles, each encompassing four key stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection, as required. With each cycle, the students' performance displayed incremental improvements until they successfully met all the criteria for success, affirming that the employed method had indeed enhanced their descriptive writing skills. (3) By participating in work in pairs activities with their peers, students can actively collaborate to acquire knowledge.

Furthermore, the researchers are satisfied with results of the classroom action research implementation, with all the aspects of writing has improved, almost meeting the standard success of writing. The average score of students increased, and the teaching-learning process improved significantly. Work in pairs method was useful in assisting students in writing descriptive text.

The researchers hope this research will be useful for teacher and learners on learning English by using this work in pairs method. The implementation of the Work in Pairs technique in enhancing students' writing skills suggests that English language teachers should consider using this method into their teaching. To implement this approach effectively, the teacher should plan engaging activities and manage time wisely. Additionally, it is crucial to provide clear instructions to ensure students understand the task at hand. The researchers realizes that this article is not flawless and hopes that it can serve as a reference for producing a more comprehensive article in the future. The researchers welcome any criticisms and suggestions to improve in writing articles and the significance of knowledge in the future.

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