



Utilizing Four Square Writing Method in Improving Students' Essay Writing Skill

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Abstract

This research aimed to (1) find out whether or not the Four-Square Writing Method is able to advance students' essay writing skill, and (2) find out the students' perceptions of the application of this method. This research was quantitative with pre-experimental design. The participants were nineteen students of the fifth-semester of the English Education Department at Institut Parahikma Indonesia. Based on the statistical analysis of the tests, the average of pre-test was 43.15, and the average of post-test was 62.57. The significant value of the tests was $.000 < .05$. It indicated that there was a significant difference between the scores of the tests in students' essay writing before and after treatment. Furthermore, t-count was higher than t-table, $10.47 > 2.101$. It implied that students' essay writing was improved after doing treatment by using this method. This research also revealed students' perceptions of the use of FSWM. There was 63.2% of the students responses indicated that it was interesting to be implemented in teaching writing, and 57.9% of those agreed that this method was effective to be implemented in writing an essay, but 10.5% of them stated that it was slightly helpful to improve their writing. Besides, when asked about obstacles in the implementation of this method, 26.3% of the students agreed that it was difficult to use; 21.1% of them said that it required too many steps to write, and 5.3% of them stated that they could not focus on writing when using it. Interestingly, 47.7% of them agreed that there were no obstacles in using it.

Keywords: Essay Writing; Four Square Writing Method; Students' Perception

Introduction

Writing is a part of the productive dimension that the learners should improve for academic purposes or specific purposes (Saville-Troike, 2006). Teaching writing is important for all students' academic lives because writing skill helps them to improve their knowledge and critical thinking, and becomes a curriculum objective in all the educational levels (Patwary & Sajib, 2018). Additionally, Harmer (1998) explained that the reason why a teacher should teach writing is that reinforcement which has advantages acquiring languages through the language written. Furthermore, the importance of teaching writing can help students creatively express their thoughts in written form. Therefore, writing is a course to draw the writers' ideas in a written form having a purpose to give information.

Several types of writing are creative writing, personal writing, and academic writing (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). One of writing types which is taught in universities is academic writing. Academic writing is formal. It has the central purpose to demonstrate ideas or knowledge of a subject. Moreover, it also aims to report research findings, analyze and evaluate a subject, explain a theme, and express an opinion about an issue and persuades the reader to accept it (Chin, et al., 2012). One of the types of the academic writing is essay. Essay writing is an informational text, nonfiction, written in paragraphs to inform the readers or provide information (National Center on Intensive Intervention, 2017). The main purpose of the essay writing is to explain the facts purposing to obtain information or to inform the reading audience with a certain topic (Munawaroh, 2014). Generally, this text is organized based on the author's purposes and goals by content. According to Livingston (2014) as cited in Rani (2019), there are six text structure types of essay writing namely cause-effect, chronology-sequence, compare-contrast, description-categorization, problem-solution, and position-reason.

However, learning writing skill can be more complicated than other skills. Balla (2021) stated that the most difficult skill in learning English is writing because the main problem of writing is that students are lack of coherence. Generally, the students are still confused to organize ideas so that they cannot make a coherence paragraph. Furthermore, in writing class where the learning process is long and monotonous, the students often feel bored. Therefore, the teachers should find an engaging method to make the students motivated and interested in learning writing. Additionally, engaging method may help students express their ideas easily in the process of writing.

One of the engaging methods that can be utilized in teaching writing is the Four-Square Writing Method (FSWM). FSWM is used before writing or pre-writing, and it has four squares that guides students to write step by step (Gould & Gould, 1999). It refers to the way in teaching and studying writing using four squares that are connected to the center box. It is able to guide the students to organize and to develop their ideas in writing. Moreover, this method is utilized effectively in prewriting which aims to generate ideas, so it is useful for the narrative text, descriptive text, expository text, recount text, and essay (Starkey, 2004 & Rahman,

2016). Therefore, it helps students to write easily because they can put on their idea using four squares and then organizes their writing into an interesting paragraph. FSWM has seven steps based on Gould and Gould (1999) as follows:

2. Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting detail • Supporting detail 	3. Supporting Idea <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting detail • Supporting detail
4. Supporting Idea <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting detail • Supporting detail 	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 0 auto; width: 30%;"> 1. Topic </div> 5. Conclusion

a. Firstly, brainstorming an introduction, two supporting ideas, and a conclusion.

The students have to write the title of the essay in the center box, then write a supporting idea in each square. Indirectly, the students write the main idea of each paragraph. Next, they must write the supporting ideas in a complete sentence. This step aims to develop students' ideas or content in writing paragraphs.

b. Secondly, making and writing supporting details.

The students must make and write supporting details. In each square, they add two, three, or four supporting details except the first box. In this step, the students can influence students' idea and can make coherence the paragraphs.

c. Thirdly, write connecting words to make a transition.

The students must write connecting words to make a transition between ideas. This step aims to teach students to write cohesion sentences and paragraphs.

d. Then, write vivid language into writing

The students start to write the supporting ideas and supporting details into a paragraph, and write appropriate words to support their writing.

e. Next, write down the sentences into a paragraph.

The students write the sentences into a paragraph. Therefore, the second square is written into the first paragraph, the third paragraph is also written into the second paragraph, and so on.

f. Students then adjust the content of each paragraph whether they are coherence and cohesive. In this stage, students can add their feeling, reflection, and thought.

g. Finally, students develop the conclusion, and check again their essay.

Some research have been conducted to explore the effectiveness of the FSWM in improving students' writing skill. Sauhana (2020) researched students' writing of descriptive text using FSWM. She conducted her research in the first year (X.1) students of SMA Negeri 4 Pekanbaru. There were twenty-nine students as participants. Her research used a mixed-method to collect the data that writing tests were employed to obtain the quantitative data, and observation sheets and field notes were conducted to get qualitative data. The result of this research indicated that there was a significant functional enhancement of students' activities during teaching and learning process.

In addition, Hardi (2019) conducted a study on the use of the Four Square Writing Method in improving students' writing ability in Medan Mulia Elementary School. The researcher focused on the implementation of it in narrative writing. In her useful study, she utilized descriptive qualitative method to gather the data. Then, the research method was analyzed the data. The effect of the study demonstrated that the students were capable of writing in paragraphs and used connecting words in their writing. Finally, they enjoyed the writing process.

Similarly, Rahayu (2018) conducted a study about students' writing ability of narrative text influenced by using FSWM. The study was researched in the tenth grade in academic year of 2018/2019. This study placed at MA Hasanuddin Bandar Lampung, and two classes were the samples involving of sixty students. Quasi-experimental design was offered an effective methodology of this study. She handled two classes, an experimental class and a control class. Each class was tested on using pre-tests and post-tests. The result of this research presented a significant progress of using the Four Square Writing Method on students' writing ability of narrative text.

Furthermore, Saniyah (2018) did a research about students' writing skill of recount text using the FSWM. The participants of the study consisted of thirty-six students, and they were the tenth grade at MA Al-Bidayah. The study was conducted using CAR. The researcher used two cycles that aim to improve students' writing in recount text implementing it. Tests, pre-test and post-test, were conducted in each cycle. In the first cycle, the pre-test was 61.12%, and the post-test was 72.2% that students get scores higher than the passing grade. In the second cycle, the pre-test was 77.8%, and the post-test was 91.7% that students get a score higher than the passing grade. Hence, the result of the study was successful to improve students' writing.

Most research on the use of the FSWM focused on writing narrative, descriptive, and recount texts; and only a few of the research concerned on essay writing. Additionally, most of the research on the use of this method was conducted in junior and senior high school contexts. Therefore, the researchers were tempted to conduct research on the use of the Four Square Writing Method in advancing students' essay writing ability in the university context. Meanwhile, this research aimed to (1) find out whether or not the method is able to advance students' essay writing skill, and (2) find out the students' perceptions of the application of this method.

Methodology

This research was quantitative with pre-experimental design. It was applied to investigate students' writing ability by utilizing Four Square Writing Method. Quantitative research is based on the assumption of statistical analysis that extensive quantitative data collection with a wide range, systematic, regulated and unified measurements, and numerical expression are important tools in the process of gaining information (Creswell, 1994: 135-136). The quantitative method was particularly pre-experimental design, one-group pretest-posttest design. The design of pre-experimental was shown as follows:

O1	X	O2
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Where:

O1= Pre-test

X = Treatment

O2= Post-test

The samples were students of the English Education Department, especially the fifth-semester class, who took writing II class at Institut Parahikma Indonesia. Therefore, nineteen students were the samples consisted of seventeen females and two males. The data were gained through tests (a pre-test and a post-test), and treatment. The details were explained as follows:

2.1. Pre-test

Before implementing the Four-Square Writing Method, the students were given a pre-test to find out their scores in writing before implementing this method. The students were assigned to write an essay in the pre-test about the below topic:

You should spend about 45 minutes on this task.
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Many people today find it difficult to balance the demands of their work and personal life. What are the causes of this situation, and what can individuals and employers do to reduce the problem?

You should give reasons for your answer, and include ideas and example from your own knowledge and experience.

Write at least 250 words.

(Cambridge IELTS Consultants, 2014)

3.2. Treatment

Treatment was conducted after doing the pre-test and before doing the post-test. Therefore, the purpose of doing treatment was to teach writing using Four Square Writing Method. There were five meetings in this stage.

4.3. Post-test

After doing treatment of the method, the students were given a post-test. Then, students' scores were collected and counted to know their achievements in writing. In the post-test, students answered the question using the Four-Square Writing Method as guidance to write then they wrote into some paragraphs. The question of the test was the same as the question in the pre-test.

5.4. Questionnaires

The questionnaires were distributed to the students of the pre-experimental class after giving treatments. The questionnaires were adapted from Rahman (2016, 42:47). Then, the result of the questionnaires were analyzed whether the students were interested or not in using Four Square Writing Method by using percentages.

Results and Discussion

The result of the tests

Since the pre-experimental design was used as a research design, pre-test and post-test were conducted to know students' writing skills, and FSWM was implemented in the essay writing class. After determining the scores of the tests, the average of the tests and standard deviation of two variables, X and Y, were calculated using paired sample t-test. The results can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Paired Samples Statistics

	The Average	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Pre-test	43.1579	19	12.40637	2.84622
Post-test	62.5789	19	13.17538	3.02264

From the table above, it can be seen that the average score of the pre-test is 43.15, and the standard deviation for the pre-test is 12.406. For the post-test, it is 62.57, and it is 13.175.

The result of the hypothesis using paired samples test is presented in the following table:

Table 2. Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	The Average	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	-	8.15350	1.87054	-	-	-	18	.000
Pre-test	19.42105			23.35091	15.49119	10.383		
Post-test								

It can be concluded from the table above that there was a significant difference between the tests in students' essay writing after treatment. The table demonstrates that the significant value of the test was $.000 < .05$. It meant that H_a was accepted and H_0 was rejected.

To prove the hypothesis, t-count and t-table were compared, the following requirements used are:

- a. If $t\text{-count} < t\text{-table}$ then H_0 is accepted and H_a is rejected.
- b. If $t\text{-count} > t\text{-table}$ then H_a is accepted and H_0 is rejected.

To find out the t-table, the value of df can be seen from the t-table of 2 tail test below 0.05. It is 2,101. Therefore, it can be calculated that the t-count was 10.47, and the t-table was 2.101. It meant that t-count was higher than t-table, $10.47 > 2.101$. From the calculation of the t values, it can be concluded that H_a was accepted and H_0 was rejected. It meant that students' essay writing was improved after doing treatment using Four-Square Writing Method at Institut Parahikma Indonesia.

Before implementing the Four-Square Writing Method in essay writing, the students of the fifth semester got low scores in which the average was 43.15. It

indicated that the students still difficult or confused to express their ideas and develop their writing. In this research, they were given treatment three times using this method. The students were not familiar with the outline of writing the essay. Furthermore, explaining the essay and format of the essay are very helpful to assist students in writing an essay. In pre-writing, he then gave the students the Four-Square Writing Method to collect, express, and organize their ideas, so they started to write their supporting ideas, supporting details, and conclusion into the four squares. In the second treatment, the students were given the explanation about connecting words. After that, they wrote their ideas, added connecting words, and wrote them down into sentences and paragraphs. In the last treatment, the students edited the content of their essays.

Implementing Four Square Writing Method could make students' essay writing improved. It was proved by the improvement of the average score (62.57) in the post test. This result is in line with the previous related research conducted by Septiani (2018) and Zahara (2017) that found the effectiveness of this method in improving students' writing ability. All in all, utilizing it in improving students' essay writing at Institut Parahikma Indonesia was significantly effective. It can be seen from the result of hypothesis test in which H_a was accepted, and H_0 was rejected ($.000 < .05$). The statement above is related to Hardi (2019) who stated that the use of this method was able to improve students' writing, especially in writing paragraphs and using connecting words. In addition, Rahayu (2018) said that using this method could assist the students to improve their ideas.

The analysis of the questionnaires

To find out students' perceptions, questionnaires were used as an instrument to collect the data. The results of the questionnaires are described as follows:

Table 3. The Result of the Questionnaires

1.	Students' perception on English writing subject.			
	Very difficult	Difficult	Easy	Very easy
	21.1%	68.4%	10.5%	0%
2.	Students' perception on how often the lecturer applied the Four Square Writing Method in teaching writing.			
	Always	Often	Seldom	Never
	21.1%	26.3%	15.8%	36.8%
3.	Students' perception on the implementation of Four-Square Writing Method in teaching writing.			
	Very interesting	Interesting	Less interesting	Not interesting
	31.6%	63.2%	5.2%	0%
4.	Students' perception on writing an essay.			

	Very difficult	Difficult	Easy	Very easy
	10.5%	89.5%	0%	0%
5.	Students' perception on the effectiveness on the Four-Square Writing Method implementation in writing an essay.			
	Very effective	Effective	Slightly effective	Not effective at all
	31.6%	57.9%	10.5%	0%
6.	Students' agreement if the Four-Square Writing Method is effective to be taught in writing class.			
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	36.8%	52.6%	10.5%	0%
7.	Students' perception on the implementation of Four-Square Writing Method helping them in improving their writing.			
	Very helpful	Helpful	Slightly helpful	Helpless
	26.3%	63.2%	10.5%	0%
8.	Students' perception on the reason why the implementation of Four-Square Writing Method can help them in writing.			
	Help to write	Increase an idea	Organize ideas	Make writing easy
	42.1%	15.8%	15.8%	26.3%
9.	Students' perception on the obstacles of applying Four Square Writing Method in writing.			
	Too many steps	Difficult to use	Cannot focus to write	No obstacles at all
	21.1%	26.3%	5.3%	47.4%
10.	Students' agreement if the implementation of Four-Square Writing Method helps them in developing their ideas in creating an essay.			
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

26.3%	73.7%	0%	0%
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The result of the statistical data analysis in this research was supported by the result of questionnaires about students' perceptions of the implementation of Four-Square Writing Method. However, almost all students still felt that writing an essay was still difficult. It can be seen from the table number 4 above showing that 10.5% of the students felt that writing an essay was very difficult and the others felt that it was difficult. Furthermore, the insights that students had were still limited. Consequently, they were anxious and confused what had to write on the essay even though 73.7% of the students agreed that this method helped them in creating essay, but 89.5% of them claimed that writing an essay was difficult. Bulqiyah, Mahbub, and Nugraheni (2021) found that affective, cognitive, and linguistic problem were the problems that makes students difficult in writing essay. This is in line with the research conducted by Nurwahida (2018) who found that most of the ESL students experience the biggest problem in writing because of the interlingual errors and the negative transfer from mother tongue that influences students' writing.

On the other hand, the majority of students in this research had positive perceptions on the use of Four-Square Writing Method in essay writing. 57.9% of the students agreed that this method was effective, and 63.2% of the students were interested in using this method to improve their essay writing skill. The findings on students' perceptions of the use of it confirms the result of previous study conducted by Rahman (2016) in which the respondents of this research also perceived that this method was effective to be implemented in essay writing. One of his questionnaires was students' responses on the effectiveness of this method implemented in writing an essay; he concluded that students could effectively create an essay using this method. Therefore, in this research, about 31.6% of them agreed that this method was very effective to apply in writing an essay. Likewise, about 31.6% the participants were very interested in using it.

According to Lumenta, Surista, and Kurnia (2020), using Four Square Writing Method made students easy to increase student's main idea and supporting details. Moreover, this method could guide students to write easily and helped them to develop and to organize their ideas in pre-writing, and to make students interested in writing an essay. It can be seen from the table that almost all students strongly agreed with this method helpful to develop students' ideas.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of Four Square Writing Method could improve students' essay writing, and assist students to write an essay step by step. Besides, the application of the Four-Square Writing Method was interesting to be implemented in teaching writing, and was effective to be implemented in writing an essay. Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that the teachers or lecturers consider to use Four Square Writing Method as one of viable methods in teaching

writing. However, due to the limitation in the broader aspect of students' writing in this study, further, the researchers suggest to explore the quality of students' writing before and after the implementation of FSWM as well as to investigate the students' attitude toward writing.

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