



Enhancing Content Development in EFL Students' Writing: Leveraging the Four-Square Writing Method

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Abstract

Effective writing skills are vital for students' development as proficient communicators and critical thinkers within the realm of education. Nevertheless, numerous students encounter difficulties when it comes to content development in their writing. This study endeavors to enhance students' content development in writing, a foundational skill essential for fostering effective communication and critical thinking. The research assesses the efficacy of the Four-Square Writing Method in improving writing content among EFL students at MAN 1 Parepare, an Islamic state senior high school in South Celebes, Indonesia. Using a pre-experimental methodology with a one-group pretest-posttest design, 18 EFL students from class XI IPA 2 were selected through cluster random sampling. Data were collected through written tests before and after the intervention and analyzed using Data Analysis of Microsoft Excel. The results demonstrate a significant improvement in students' writing content at MAN 1 Parepare, with average scores increasing from 59.44 (fair) to 89.63 (very good). A t-test revealed a substantial difference between pretest and posttest scores, with a t-value of 15.46, surpassing the critical t-table value of 2.11. These findings indicate that the Four-Square Writing Method effectively addresses content development challenges in student writing, highlighting its potential as an alternative teaching method in diverse educational settings to enhance students' abilities in planning, organizing, and developing written content.

Keywords: *Four-Square Writing Method; Content of Writing; South Celebes; Microsoft Excel; EFL Students*

Introduction

The upward trajectory of English as a dominant means of daily communication has been increasingly widespread in recent years. This phenomenon is not restricted to interactions with individuals from other countries but is also notable in domestic communication where English serves as an alternative language to Indonesian (Nur et al., 2021). English has transcended its status as just a foreign language and has become an indispensable tool in diverse facets of human existence, ranging from technology, politics, economy, to culture.

In Indonesia, English is characterized as a foreign language, involving proficiency in four essential skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Language proficiency, particularly in English, is

categorized into two core groups: productive skills, encompassing speaking and writing, and receptive skills, which involve listening and reading.

Writing holds a pivotal role in communicating one's thoughts and experiences. It agrees with the concept that through writing, individuals can express their ideas, knowledge, and life experiences using a clear, coherent, expressive, comprehensible, and engaging written language (Bakti et al., 2023). Consequently, it is evident that improving students' writing skills through supplementary education is paramount (Rahman et al., 2022).

In Parepare, South Celebes, English continues to pose challenges for the majority of students, particularly in the realm of writing. Writing is not solely about converting language into text; it also serves as a mechanism for communicating ideas and knowledge in a structured manner (Ilahi et al., 2023). Developing students' writing skills through supplementary education is imperative since it enables them to enhance their understanding of various subjects. To accomplish this, students must foster critical thinking skills and engage in research to communicate relevant knowledge and information associated with the topics they are discussing or writing about (Faizal et al., 2022).

The content of a written piece represents the ideas expressed by the author in each paragraph. The quality of content in writing significantly influences students' proficiency (Ansar et al., 2022). Thus, students must master the skill of developing content effectively. Many students encounter difficulties initiating the writing process due to a lack of ideas, making it challenging to complete their writing assignments successfully. This predicament is not unique to MAN 1 Parepare; students here also grapple with the challenge of managing ideas during the writing process.

To address these challenges, the researcher embarked on implementing the Four-Square Method, a teaching technique designed to stimulate students and elevate the quality of their written content. The Four-Square Writing Method has demonstrated its effectiveness in teaching fundamental writing skills and can be readily applied across various educational levels and disciplines. With its many advantages, this method holds the potential to exert a positive influence on the process of learning to write among students

Theoretical Review

Concept of Writing

Writing is a complex skill that involves the processing of thoughts and emotions by the writer, and it should not be underestimated because of its considerable complexity. Typically, writing is considered the final skill to be gained in language skills, following speaking (Jagaiah et al., 2020). Key aspects of learning to write include mastering vocabulary, correct spelling, and the patterns of grammatical structure necessary for constructing effective sentences or paragraphs (Hasanah et al., 2022). It's important to note that writing is a complex skill for both native and non-native speakers, as it requires the integration of various elements related to content, structure, language, vocabulary, as well as mechanics like spelling, punctuation, and the use of capital letters (Fitriani et al., 2019).

In summary, writing is the ability to express ideas that demand a deep understanding, a firm grasp of vocabulary, control over sentence structure, and the skill to connect one sentence to another.

Scoring Rubric of Writing

When assessing English writing skills, a 'Scoring Rubric' or assessment rubric serves as a crucial tool, providing a clear framework for evaluating the quality of students' writing (Ali et al., 2023). It offers insight into how specific criteria are used to assess the quality of a written piece. A rubric is a teacher's tool for evaluating student performance (A. D. Brown, 2017). It serves as an assessment guide, outlining assessment criteria (or assessment standards) based on expected outcomes and student performance.

Rubrics are commonly used to assess written assignments and oral presentations, as well as for self-assessment, reflection, and peer assessment. Rubric assessment is valuable for evaluating complex tasks such as written assignments (e.g., essays, papers, portfolios), presentations (e.g., debates, role plays), group work, or other types of products or performances (e.g., art projects, portfolios) (Rukmini et al., 2017).

In this research, the assessment employs a rubric that specifically focuses on the “content of writing.” The rubric developed by Brown (H. D. Brown et al., 2004) is used as a tool to assess and measure the quality of students’ written content. By using rubric, the researcher can provide an aim and structured assessment of how students can develop and convey the content of their writing (Hasanah et al., 2023). This rubric includes multiple criteria designed to identify essential aspects of writing, such as clarity, relevance, understanding of the material, and the students’ ability to express ideas effectively. Using this rubric ensures transparency and consistency in the assessment process, as each criterion has a clear description of quality.

Table 1 Writing Scoring Rubric

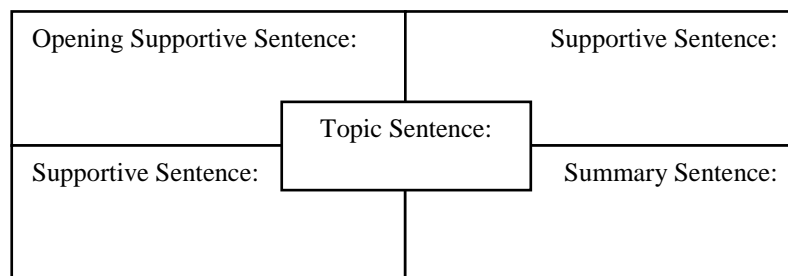
Components of Writing	4-Excellent	3-Good	2-Fair	1-Poor	Weighting
Content (C)	Present the information in well-chosen details across the paragraph	Present the information with details in parts of the paragraph	Present the information with some details	Present no clear information	3
Vocabulary (V)	Good vocabulary choice	Error in vocabulary choice is few and do not interfere with understanding.	Errors in vocabulary choice are and sometimes interfere with understanding.	Many errors in vocabulary choice that severally interferes with understanding	2.5
Grammar (G)	Good grammar in	Errors in grammar choice are few and do not interfere with understanding.	Errors in grammar choice are and sometimes interfere with understanding.	Many errors in grammar choice that severally interferes with understanding	2.5
Mechanics (M)	Good spelling, punctuation, and capitalization understanding	Error in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization are few.	Error in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization and sometimes interfere with understanding.	Error in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization severely interfere with understanding	2

Adapted (H. D. Brown, 2013)

Concept of Four-Square Writing Method

Four Square Writing Method is an instructional tool designed to enhance students' writing skills systematically. It utilizes a four-square framework to help students plan and organize their writing clearly, with each square representing essential components of a text, including introduction, main ideas, details, and conclusion (Ilmiah et al., 2017)

This method's history traces its evolution from its inception as an effective teaching tool for improving students' essay writing abilities. Judith S. Gould and Evan Jay Gould first developed the Four-Square Writing Method in 1999, primarily as an instructional aid to help students craft persuasive or argumentative essays (J. Gould et al., 2010). The approach originated from the observation that many students struggled to structure and articulate their ideas in essays. To address this issue, Judith and Evan Jay Gould conceived the Four-Square Writing Method as a systematic approach to essay planning and organization, depicting an essay as four distinct sections.



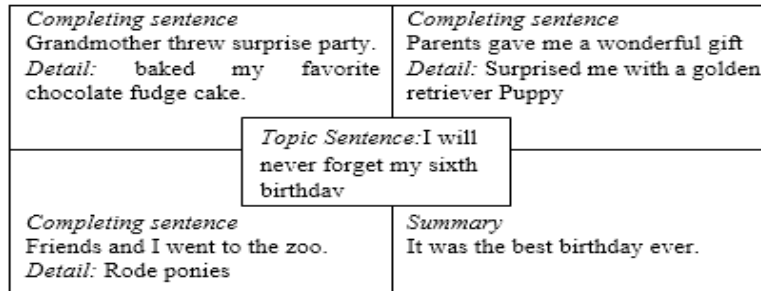
Picture 1. Four-Square Writing Method

Initially, the method was predominantly focused on persuasive essays, where students were taught to formulate their arguments clearly and persuasively. However, over time, the method expanded and found applications in various types of writing, including descriptive, narrative, and informative, making it more flexible and relevant in diverse educational writing contexts.

Despite numerous developments in writing education and the emergence of various new teaching methods, the Four-Square Writing Method remains relevant and widely used in various educational contexts. Its success and longevity over the years demonstrate that systematic and structured approaches like this still play a crucial role in helping students develop their writing skills. Its developmental history reflects ongoing efforts to enhance writing education and provide effective tools to students for expressing their ideas in writing.

Here are the steps to implement the Four-Square Writing Method in writing instruction:

- 1) Begin by preparing a sheet of paper and drawing a large rectangular shape. Within this large rectangle, draw five smaller squares.
- 2) In the middle square, have the students write sentences related to the given writing theme or topic.
- 3) Continue by filling in the three remaining squares. In the top left and right squares, and the bottom left square, develop the thesis of the main topic, placing one sentence in each square: the top left square contains the opening supporting sentence, and the two subsequent squares contain additional supporting information.
- 4) Finally, have the students write a concluding sentence in the bottom right square, summarizing how the reader perceives the topic.



Picture 2. Development of a Paragraph

Methodology

A pre-experimental approach with a one-group pretest-posttest research design was employed in this research. The research sample consisted of 18 EFL students from class XI IPA 2, selected through cluster random sampling to ensure efficiency and representativeness. The instrument consisted of both pretest and posttest essays, separated by a four-session treatment phase during which the Four-Square Writing Method was applied in the classroom.

In both tests, students were allotted a 40-minute time frame to complete their essays. The pretest theme centered around "Bullying at schools," while the posttest allowed students to choose between themes like "The Potential Negative Effects of Screen Time on Teenagers" and "Continuing Education after High School Graduation."

The students' writing was evaluated using a scoring rubric. Subsequently, the collected data underwent automated analysis using Microsoft Excel. The Data menu, Data Analysis toolbar, and Analysis Tools were utilized, specifically the t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means. This menu facilitated the comparison of average scores between paired samples, which were derived from the same group but received different treatments, as evident in the pretest and posttest activities. The analysis encompassed the assessment of pretest and posttest scores, the calculation of average scores, standard deviations, and the conduct of t-tests with t-tables.

Result

Understanding and assessing the Category of Student Writing Results is of paramount importance in our efforts to comprehend the extent of students' writing skills development. This category reflects the level of proficiency acquired by students in developing the content of their writing, which is evaluated through pretest and posttest assessments. By categorizing students' results into specific categories, we can identify their skill levels and determine whether significant improvements have occurred following the implementation of the Four-Square Writing Method. The analysis of these categories of student writing results provides a profound insight into the development of their writing abilities and can offer valuable information for enhancing teaching and learning methods in the future.

Table 2. The Category of Student Writing Results

No	Category	Score	Pretest		Posttest	
			Total	%	Total	%
1	Excellent	96-100	0	0.0	8	44.4
2	Very Good	86-95	0	0.0	3	16.7
3	Good	76-85	1	5.6	5	27.8
4	Fairly Good	66-75	7	38.9	2	11.1
5	Fair	46-65	1	5.6	0	0.0
6	Poor	36-45	9	50.0	0	0.0
7	Very Poor	0-35	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total			18	100.0	18	100.0

Table 2 presents a comparison of student writing outcomes between the pretest and posttest phases. In this table, student performance is categorized into different groups, such as "Excellent," "Very Good," "Good," "Fairly Good," "Fair," "Poor," and "Very Poor." These categories indicate the proficiency levels of students in developing the content of their writing, and the results are quantified in terms of the number of students and the percentage of the total.

During the pretest phase, it is evident that most students fell into the "Poor" category, with 50% of the students (9 out of 18) in this group. Only one student achieved the "Good" category, while the remaining students were distributed across various other categories, including "Fairly Good," "Fair," and "Very Good." Notably, none of the students reached the highest category, "Excellent," in the pretest.

In contrast, significant changes in student result categories occurred during the posttest phase. Approximately 44.4% of students (8 students) reached the "Excellent" category, signifying a notable improvement compared to the pretest. Several other students also progressed to the "Good" and "Very Good" categories, indicating enhanced writing skills. Furthermore, some students who initially scored in the "Poor" category during the pretest moved to different categories in the posttest.

The data from this table indicates that the implementation of the Four-Square Writing Method positively impacted students' writing abilities. The majority of students achieved higher result categories in the posttest compared to the pretest. This improvement reflects the efficacy of the teaching approach in assisting students in enhancing their writing skills.

Data Analysis

Tabel 3. *T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means*

	<i>Pretest</i>	<i>Posttest</i>
<i>Mean</i>	59.44	89.63
<i>Variance</i>	110.13	88.74
<i>Observations</i>	18.00	18.00
<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	0.66	
<i>Hypothesized Mean Difference</i>	-	
<i>df</i>	17.00	
<i>t Stat</i>	(15.46)	
<i>P(T<=t) one-tail</i>	0.00	
<i>t Critical one-tail</i>	1.74	
<i>P(T<=t) two-tail</i>	0.00	
<i>t Critical two-tail</i>	2.11	

The data analysis from Table 3 reveals significant changes. The average score in the pretest was 59.44, while the average score in the posttest substantially increased to 89.63. Furthermore, the comparison of variance in the pretest (110.13) and posttest (88.74) also reflects a positive change in the distribution of student scores.

Additionally, the Pearson Correlation, which reached 0.66, indicates a positive relationship between pretest and posttest scores, affirming that changes in students' ability to develop writing content occurred after the intervention.

The results of the two-tail t-test analysis show that the t-Stat (t-test) value is 15.46 and two-tail t-critical value is 2.11. Since the t-Stat significantly exceeds the two-tail t-critical value, it can be concluded that the difference between student scores in the Pretest and Posttest is statistically significant. The Four-Square Writing Method has a tangible and statistically significant impact on the development of students' writing abilities.

Discussion

1. Constructivist Approach in Writing

This study is in line with the constructivist framework in writing education, emphasizing the active construction of knowledge through learning experiences (Voskamp et al., 2020). The Four-Square Writing Method, with its structured guidance, significantly improved students' writing abilities. Results showed substantial shifts from "Fair" to "Very Good" categories between the Pretest and Posttest.

Moreover, the method encouraged students' active role in planning and organizing their writing, aligning with constructivist principles (Pajares, 2003). The approach enabled a deeper understanding of their own writing.

2. Developing Writing Skills through Structured Approaches

Structured approaches in writing instruction are of paramount importance (Berliner et al., 2004). The Four-Square Writing Method provided clear guidance, leading to improved planning and organization of ideas. Notably, Pretest to Posttest data indicated significant progress, particularly in the "Good" category.

This approach helps students organize and develop their ideas more effectively, supporting the principles of structured writing instruction (Anderman et al., 2011).

3. Utilizing Technology and Media in Writing Instruction

The study underlines the significance of using instructional media like the Four-Square Writing Method in writing education (Dalton, 2012; Noviasmy et al., 2023). It resulted in a considerable improvement in students' writing skills. The use of technology provided dynamic interaction with the instructional content.

The method's integration with technology creates opportunities for students to develop their writing skills effectively (Trisnadewi et al., 2020).

4. Motivation in Writing

Motivation is a key factor in writing progress (Anderman et al., 2020). The Four-Square Writing Method enhances student motivation by providing clear goals and supportive guidance. The Posttest data revealed increased achievements in higher categories, indicating the method's role in sustaining student motivation for writing (Cahyono et al., 2020).

In summary, the study demonstrates the Four-Square Writing Method's effectiveness in enhancing students' writing skills, aligning with constructivist, structured, and technology-integrated approaches. The method not only supports skill development but also maintains student motivation in successful writing instruction.

Conclusion

The application of the Four-Square Writing Method has unequivocally proven its efficacy in enhancing the content of writing proficiency of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at MAN 1 Parepare, as indicated by the significantly higher t-test value (15.46) in comparison to the t-table value (2.11). This method consistently provides substantial support for improving students' skills in structuring, organizing, and enhancing the substance of their compositions. Consequently, it contributes to a comprehensive grasp of how instructional approaches can profoundly influence the development of students' writing abilities. These findings establish a robust academic basis for the formulation of more

effective curricula and instructional strategies designed to enhance students' writing skills across diverse educational levels.

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