

# *Write From The Start* Strategy Increases The Writing Ability The Pupils Of Elementary School

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the application of *write from the start* strategy in order to increase the writing ability of 34 pupils of State Elementary School 178 Palembang. It is an attempt to report a collaborative effort of two teachers doing classroom action research. It went through three stages and the pupils' writing scores increased consecutively. In the first Cycle I, the average score was 67, the second Cycle 74 and, and the third Cycle 76. The strategy improved the pupils' scores.

Key words: ability, writing, *write from the start* strategy

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian Language (IL) is a compulsory subject for elementary school pupils in Indonesia; they are expected to master the language skills including the writing skill (See Nurizzati 2005:2). The 2006 School Based Curriculum (SBC) states that grade 3 pupils should be able to write a simple composition.

SBC recommends the application of communicative and contextual approach (Depdikbud, 2001:2). This approach emphasizes on developing the language skills of IL for communicative purposes, for example, the skill to write a simple composition. Moreover, Nurhadi (2002) argues that the contextual approach requires use of the pupils' experiences. However, SBC differs in theory and field practice.

My interview to the classroom teacher teaching IL at State Elementary School 178 Palembang resulted in the following information.<sup>14</sup> The teacher focused less on communicative purposes especially on the skill writing. She seldom assigned her pupils to write a simple composition. She depended on the book which did not teach writing. She believed that the book met the requirements of SBC although it simply attached relevant parts of the SBC and not translated them into relevant materials. However, this book was her Bible.

A book may contain pictures and necessary parts for the teacher and her pupils to do writing assignments. However, the teacher felt it was not yet the time for her pupils to write a simple composition.

A book may contain pictures, props and assignments for the pupils to write about yet it does not apply the contextual approach fully. To my scrutiny, the book the teacher used simply required the pupils to write about what they saw in the pictures. They did not involve the pupils' needs, interests and experiences. In addition, the book contained very few exercises on writing.

The pretest average score of the pupils was 22. The *write from the start* strategy (WSS) was implemented to improve the pupils' writing skill. This strategy required them to write about what they knew and experienced. They started writing from scratch. This way fulfilled the learning strategy recommended by SBC.

WSS was introduced by Davidson and Blot (1994). Davidson dan Blot (1994:v) believed learners could learn to write at an early age and they could learn from scratch. This strategy was believed to provide practice and experience to use IL from an early age (Yurniwati, 2005:4). The learners learn to write by writing and the strategy involved them in writing activities regardless of grammatical and spelling mistakes. It enables the classroom teacher to develop learners as writers.

WSS enables learners to talk and write about themselves, their friends, and relatives and their own ideas. A writing

lesson can be more effective because it fulfills the learners' needs. They are asked to read a model text and imitate such composition (Suyanto, 2002: 7—10). The model text is there but the students need to use their own words to write their own composition.

The study by Davidson and Blot (1994:vii) showed that WSS could increase learners' ability to write. The result of prior reflection between the classroom teacher of State Elementary School 178 Palembang and I as a collaborator determines WSS as a strategy to improve writing skill.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This was a classroom action research as practiced by Kemmis dan McTaggart (cited in Diaz-Maggioli, 2003:7). It consisted of multi-cycles and each cycle four aspects: planning, action, observation and reflection. In Cycle I, the application of WSS was planned and implemented, and results observed and reflected. Some modifications were made to improve the implementation of the strategy in Cycle II. Continual improvement was the key for consecutive cycles. The n Cycle ended when the criteria for success were met.

The subject of this study was third grade pupils of State Elementary School 178 Palembang. There were 34 pupils in population. The school is located at Jl. Mayor Salim Batubara Sekip Bendung Palembang.

The data for this study included pre-test and post-test scores, and notes on observation and interview. The test average scores were presented in percentage and tables. Information from the observation and interview was described. Criteria for success consisted of two aspects: process and product.

In terms of process, success meant that the pupils were active, cooperative and independent when they were taught by WSS. If 85% of them achieved a score of  $\geq 65$ , the cycle was completed. An increase in their average score was also a success indicator. If their average score of each cycle was higher than that of the pretest, the strategy applied was successful.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A pretest was given to the pupils before WSS was implemented. The pretest required them to write about their journey from their houses to the school. None of the 34 pupils under study got a score of  $\geq 65$ . Most wrote two or three words. They did not write any sentence. Their average score was 22. The test result showed that the pupils' ability to write a simple composition was low.

### 3.1 Cycle I

WSS practiced in the classroom can be explained as follows.

The classroom teacher and I asked the pupils the questions such as 'Do you like writing?', 'Do you know some famous Indonesian writers like Chairil Anwar and Andrea Hirata?', "What is your ambition? These questions should be interrelated to the subject of writing.

<sup>14</sup> Use of I and my refers to the first author and she and her refers to the second author

After they answered, let us say, one wanted to be a doctor, and another a president. We told them 'that was great.' and famous people usually wrote a lot. We should motivate them to enjoy writing.

After they listened to encouraging words, they were asked to get ready to write. We gave them a list of questions related to them, for example, age, hometown, address, relatives, favorite subjects, ambition, hobbies and they were asked if they wanted to write about other matters related to their life.

An interview was used to collect information. The pupils were assigned to write similar questions and ask each other. They used the answers to write about their classmate. They could start writing by referring to the model given:

#### **Tentang Diri Saya**

Nama saya Faiz Maulana. Saya dilahirkan di Palembang pada tanggal 17 Februari 2003. Alamat rumah saya di Jalan Mayor Salim Batubara No.10 RT 14 RW 004 Sekip Tengah Palembang. Nama ayah saya Sartono. Nama ibu saya Lasmini. Saya memiliki dua saudara kandung. Nama saudara kandung saya Arif Budiman dan Neni Purwati. Makanan kesukaan saya bakso. Hobi saya membaca buku cerita. Cita-cita saya menjadi dokter. Itulah cerita tentang saya.

The result of interview and the example of composition were the starting point for all pupils to believe they could write well. They discussed information to be put down in their composition and asked us necessary questions. We listened more. Good rapport was established. They were not reluctant to express their ideas and very active in the writing process. All compositions by the pupils were hanged around the stereo-formed walls. Below is one composition by a pupil:

#### **Tentang Diri Saya**

Nama saya ialah Mariska Salsa Putri. Saya dilahirkan di Palembang pada tanggal 9 Maret 2004. Alamat rumah saya di Jalan Sekip Bendung No. 1322 RT 19 RW 05 Palembang. Nama ayah saya Candra Putra Kirawan. Nama ibu saya Suciati. Saya tidak memiliki saudara kandung. Makanan kesukaan saya kue donat. Hobi saya menggambar. Cita-cita saya ingin menjadi dokter dan guru. Itulah cerita tentang saya.

when they expressed their ideas. They seemed to experience mental block because they were not used to writing from scratch. Considering the results and the success criteria, Cycle II was needed.

### **3.2 Cycle II**

Our reflection on Cycle I resulted in the following. We heard the pupils wanted to write about pets and Cycle II was directed to this idea. The teaching strategy was the

following. We asked them about their hobby in keeping pets: 'Do you like animals?', 'Do you know much about your pets?' 'What are their characteristics?' 'What do they eat?' 'Why do you like ...?'

The pupils were geared to know more about their pets and talk about them.

We made a table in which name of the pet, type of color, body structure, living place, movement were listed. They filled out the table to identify their respective pet and used the table from which they could start to write about their pet. Imitating our writing model was allowed as long as they used their words and information they were familiar with.

Below is a composition by our subject:

#### **Hewan kesukaanku**

Saya senang kelinci. Warnanya putih. Badannya gemuk. Telinganya panjang. Kakinya berjumlah 4 (empat). Matanya ada 2 (dua). Buntutnya ada 1 dan buntutnya pendek. Hidungnya ada satu dan hidungnya pendek. Giginya ada 2 (dua). Makanannya wortel dan sayur. Cara bergerakinya berloncat-loncat. Dia tidur berguling. Dia senang bermain. Dia tinggal di kandangnya. Dia lucu dan dia juga *murut*. Dia senang bermain dengan teman saya, tapi sayang dia sudah meninggal. Aku sedih, aku sayang kepadanya. Itulah cerita hewan kesukaanku.

The pupils were active during the writing process. They asked questions how to use and fill out the table. This process showed its success. The writing of the topic resulted in the following: 26 pupils (75%) got a score of  $\geq 65$  and their average score was 74. The data indicated that the success criteria were not met.

One thing to note in this cycle was that several pupils still found it difficult to express their ideas. One was certainly lazy to write. If they were not successful in their task, it was due to their understanding of a paragraph development and use of correct spelling and grammar. Looking at this result and success criteria, Cycle III was needed.

### **3.3 Cycle III**

We started with a review and questions: 'What did you write about before?', 'Do you feel bored about writing when you are asked to?', 'Are you now accustomed to writing a diary?' 'How do you feel after you know that you can express yourself?' 'How do you react to your writing?' All these questions were geared to motivate the pupils to start and enjoy writing.

We restated that famous people were those who enjoyed reading and writing. Therefore, the pupils should imitate their habits. They looked enthusiastic when they listened to our talk. They were prepared to start learning to write better.

We provided an example of how to collect data. They were assigned to write about themselves. The topic was similar to that of Cycle. They were expected to be able to write better sentences and express themselves more freely.

The pupils also exchanged information because one could tell another how she or he perceived his or her classmate. Each could use 'I' in his or her writing. The composition below was a written by one of the subjects:

#### **Tentang Saya**

Nama saya Mariska Salsa Putri. Saya senang warna hijau dan kuning. Saya senang kelinci. Saya senang menggambar dan membaca. Saya punya seorang sahabat namanya dwi dan nadia. Saya juga punya guru yang pintar dan baik hati. Saya senang sekali bertemu teman dan guru yang pintar dan baik. Saya senang sekolah di sini. Saya senang pelajaran matematika dan bahasa Indonesia. Saya juga senang pelajaran olahraga. Saya suka bermain berbi dan boneka. Saya juga punya dua orang adik sepupu namanya Zahra dan bella. Dia lucu sekali. Itulah cerita tentang saya.

All the pupils looked enthusiastic to do the writing assignment. In terms of process, Cycle III was successful. In terms of product, thirty of the 34 pupils (88%) got a score of  $\geq 65$  and their average score was 76. In other words, the success criteria were met and Cycle III ended. The following tables show success percentages and average scores of each cycle.

The results show that WSS could improve the pupils' writing skill. It required more frequent practice in order to do so. Abdurrahman (2005:2) states that language skills, especially the writing one, require continuous practice. Yurniwati (2005:4) argues that learning to write should focus on practice-based activities. In other words, teaching writing weighs more on practice rather than theory. A classroom teacher should consider a proportionate balance of 25% theory and 75% practice. The more practice is given, the better and sooner the pupils improve their writing skill.

WSS as required by the contextual approach sparked off improving the learners' writing skill through experience. It motivates them to relate their knowledge to writing about their life. This type of learning is more productive and meaningful (Nurhadi, 2002:2).

Writing teachers are recommended to make use of the strategy. This is an alternative to try it out. Learners may be more creative when they are taught by the application of such strategy.

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