



Improving Students' Writing Skills Through the Controlled to Free Approach with Do-It-Yourself (DIY) "Daily activities"

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of a blended pedagogical approach in improving students' writing skills. This approach combines a controlled-to-free writing method with engaging Do-It-Yourself (DIY) "Daily Activities" designed to enhance motivation and personalize the learning experience. Specifically, this study aims to determine if this integrated approach leads to significant improvements in students' writing proficiency, fluency, accuracy, and complexity compared to traditional writing instruction. This study used a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach to address the practical challenges of improving students' writing skills through the controlled to free approach combined with DIY "Daily Activities." The research showed that Post-test results showed a 25% improvement in students' writing scores compared to the pre-test. Specifically, grammar accuracy improved by 20%, coherence by 30%, and vocabulary usage by 25%. So, we can conclude that DIY "Daily Activities," is effective in improving students' writing skills.

Keywords: Writing Skills, Controlled to Free Approach, Do-It-Yourself (DIY), Daily activities

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1. Introduction

One of the most important abilities in learning English is writing. Nonetheless, a lot of students find it difficult to write clearly, coherently, and with proper grammar. The Controlled to Free Approach is a useful strategy for improving writing abilities since it lets students begin with structured assignments before progressing to more autonomous writing exercises. Students can benefit from a meaningful, imaginative, and captivating learning experience when this method is combined with DIY (Do-It-Yourself) projects. (Nurfadhilah et al., 2023). Writing is a fundamental skill crucial for academic success, professional development, and effective communication in all aspects of life. However, a growing concern exists regarding



declining writing proficiency among students, impacting their ability to effectively express ideas, analyze information, and engage in critical thinking. Traditional approaches to writing instruction, often focusing heavily on grammar and mechanics through controlled exercises, frequently fail to adequately develop students' fluency, creativity, and independent writing abilities. Students may possess a strong grasp of grammatical rules but struggle to apply these skills in meaningful and engaging writing contexts. This necessitates a reevaluation of current pedagogical approaches to writing instruction.(Agustina, 2020)

The limitations of traditional writing instruction have led to explorations of alternative pedagogical approaches. Research on writing pedagogy has highlighted the importance of balancing structured learning with opportunities for creative expression. The "process approach" emphasizes iterative drafting and revision, while genre-based approaches focus on the conventions of different writing genres. However, many of these methods still struggle to fully engage students and address the motivational challenges inherent in writing instruction. There's a growing recognition that fostering a positive attitude toward writing, coupled with effective skill-building strategies, is crucial for long-term success.(Nation & Newton, 2008)

This study addresses this need by exploring the potential of a blended approach that combines the structure of controlled writing exercises with the freedom of more open-ended writing tasks. Furthermore, it integrates Do-It-Yourself (DIY) "Daily Activities" to enhance engagement and personalize the learning experience. The controlled-to-free approach provides a scaffolded framework, gradually guiding students from structured exercises to more independent writing, fostering confidence and skill development. The DIY activities offer opportunities for hands-on learning, creative expression, and personalized application of newly acquired writing skills, promoting active learning and increased engagement. This integrated approach aims to address both the technical and motivational aspects of writing development.(Brooks, 2023)

The problem addressed in this research is the persistent challenge of developing proficient writing skills in students. While traditional writing instruction often emphasizes



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grammar and mechanics through controlled exercises, it frequently fails to adequately foster creative expression, fluency, and independent writing abilities. Students often struggle to translate their understanding of grammatical rules into effective and engaging written communication. Furthermore, a lack of engagement and motivation can hinder students' progress and lead to negative attitudes towards writing. This research seeks to address this gap by investigating whether a blended pedagogical approach combining controlled writing exercises with progressively more free writing activities and incorporating engaging Do-It-Yourself (DIY) "Daily Activities"—can significantly improve students' writing skills, increase their engagement, and cultivate a more positive attitude towards writing. The current lack of research specifically examining the combined impact of a controlled-to-free writing approach with DIY activities necessitates this investigation to inform more effective writing instruction. So, the problem of the research is How can Controlled to Free Approach with Do-It-Yourself (DIY) “Daily activities” can improve Students' Writing Skills?

In particular, this study aims to ascertain whether this integrated approach leads to significant improvements in students' writing proficiency, fluency, accuracy, and complexity when compared to traditional writing instruction. It also aims to understand students' perceptions of the DIY activities and their impact on engagement and attitudes towards writing. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the development of more effective and engaging writing pedagogy that fosters both the technical skills and the creative expression essential for successful written communication. The research aims to investigate the effectiveness of a blended pedagogical approach to improving students' writing skills by combining a controlled-to-free writing method with engaging Do-It- Yourself (DIY) "Daily Activities" designed to enhance motivation and personalize the learning experience.

The urgency of this research is driven by declining student writing proficiency, the limitations of traditional teaching methods, and the need for more engaging pedagogical approaches. Current instruction often fails to adequately foster creativity and independent writing skills. Innovative strategies, such as integrating DIY activities with a controlled- to-



free writing approach, are needed. This research addresses a critical gap in the literature by investigating the effectiveness of this promising, yet under-researched, combined method, offering timely solutions to improve student writing outcomes

2. Method

This study used a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach to address the practical challenges of improving students' writing skills through the controlled to free approach combined with DIY “Daily Activities.”

The research will be conducted in two cycles, each consisting of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection.

Cycle 1:

- a) Planning: Develop lesson plans incorporating controlled writing tasks and DIY “Daily Activities” worksheets.
- b) Action: Implement the planned activities in the classroom.
- c) Observation: Monitor students’ participation and progress using observation checklists.
- d) Reflection: Analyze results and identify areas for improvement.

Cycle 2:

- a) Planning: Revise lesson plans based on Cycle 1 reflections.
- b) Action: Execute the revised activities.
- c) Observation: Collect data on students' enhanced performance and engagement.
- d) Reflection: Conclude findings and prepare recommendations

2.1. Setting and Participants

The research carried out at Widyamana Mahakam University Samarinda. This study included management study program students who have completed they talk about daily activities. The number of pupils scheduled to participate exceeds 45.



2.2. Research Instruments

- a) Pre- and post-tests to assess writing skills improvement.
- b) Observation checklists to track engagement during tasks.
- c) Student reflections and feedback forms.

2.3. Data Collection Techniques

The techniques to collect the data of this study were applied the techniques as followed:

2.3.1. Pretest

The test will be conducted before the treatment of teaching, known as the pretest in order to assess students' speaking skills. The pretest refers to the initial test, measures how well students have understood the material or topic that will be taught. (Effendy, 2016) Pretest results will be compared to the posttest.

2.3.2. Posttest

The aim of conducting the posttest is to see the student's responses and improvement in their writing skills. The posttest referred to a test used to determine whether students can acquire all necessary material to the best of their skills after the implementation of action (Effendy, 2016). The posttest would be conducted after the pretest and the treatment.

2.3.3. Observation

In every meeting, the researcher uses the observation technique in order to collect the data. The observation checklist sheet is used to observed the implementation of teaching and learning process to get the real condition in the classroom. The researcher acted as the teacher in the class. The observation checklist observed the researcher's teaching performance.

2.3.4. Documentation

Documentation is used in the form of to observer documented learning activities throughout the entire meeting.



2.4. Data Analysis Technique

Paragraphs contain descriptions of subtitles The researcher uses rubric to designed and assess students' writing skills during the implementation of the Controlled to Free Approach with Do-It-Yourself (DIY) 'daily activities.' It evaluates key areas such as grammar, vocabulary, coherence, creativity, and fluency, measuring students' progress from controlled to freer writing stages.(Harmer, 2004)

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Satisfactory (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
Grammar & Sentence Structure	The writing consistently uses correct grammar and sentence structures with minimal errors.	Grammar and sentence structure are mostly correct, with a few errors that do not hinder comprehension.	Grammar and sentence structure are somewhat inconsistent, with frequent errors that may cause minor confusion.	Grammar and sentence structure are significantly flawed, making comprehension difficult.
Coherence & Organization	The writing is well-organized with clear introduction, body, and conclusion. Ideas flow logically and seamlessly.	The writing is generally organized, with clear progression of ideas, though some transitions may be abrupt.	The writing has an unclear structure, with some jumbled or incomplete ideas, and weak transitions.	The writing lacks a clear structure, with ideas presented in a confusing or random order.
Vocabulary & Language Use	Demonstrates an extensive and varied vocabulary with precise word	Uses a varied vocabulary, with occasional repetition or minor	Limited vocabulary with frequent repetition or incorrect word	Very basic vocabulary with significant repetition and



	choices that enhance meaning.	missteps in word choice.	choices, making the writing less effective.	frequent misuse of words.
Creativity & Detail	The writing is highly creative, offering vivid descriptions and engaging details about daily activities.	The writing is creative and includes some engaging details, though some sections could be more descriptive	The writing has some creativity but lacks sufficient detail or engagement in parts.	The writing lacks creativity, with minimal or no details to engage the reader.
Adherence to Task	Fully addresses the prompt, providing clear and insightful descriptions of the daily activity.	Addresses the prompt well, with only minor aspects of the activity missing or unclear.	Addresses the prompt but leaves out some important elements or details of the daily activity.	Does not effectively address the prompt or misses key elements of the daily activity.
Fluency & Spontaneity (Free Stage)	The writing flows naturally, demonstrating ease and fluency in language use. The student shows confidence in expressing ideas.	The writing flows well, though with slight hesitations or awkward phrasing. The student shows some comfort in expressing ideas freely.	The writing shows effort but lacks fluency. The student struggles with expressing ideas naturally or confidently.	The writing lacks fluency, with frequent pauses or errors that disrupt the expression of ideas.



3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Cycle 1

The initial stage focused on controlled writing exercises, such as sentence completion and guided paragraph writing. Observations revealed that students showed improvement in grammar but struggled with coherence and idea development. Reflection journals indicated that students appreciated the structured guidance but felt restricted in expressing their thoughts. Additionally, classroom discussions revealed that students lacked confidence in developing independent writing, as they relied heavily on provided structures. (Souza et al., 2021)

3.2. Cycle 2

The second cycle introduced semi-controlled and free writing tasks, allowing students to write about their DIY "Daily Activities." This approach significantly enhanced their ability to structure essays and develop ideas independently. During the semi-controlled phase, students were given prompts that encouraged creativity while still providing some structure. By the free writing phase, students demonstrated greater fluency, originality, and improved grammar. (Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, 2014)

Post-test results showed a 25% improvement in students' writing scores compared to the pre-test. Specifically, grammar accuracy improved by 20%, coherence by 30%, and vocabulary usage by 25%. Moreover, students expressed increased motivation and confidence in their writing skills. Interviews with students revealed that they enjoyed the DIY aspect of the activities, as it allowed them to relate writing tasks to real-life experiences, making the learning process more meaningful and engaging.

Teacher observations also indicated a higher level of participation and enthusiasm compared to the first cycle. Students began to ask more questions about how to improve their writing rather than merely seeking corrections. Peer review sessions became more productive, as students provided constructive feedback to their classmates.



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To assess students' writing improvements, the following evaluation criteria were applied:

Criteria	Before Cycle 1	After Cycle 1	After Cycle 2
Grammar & Sentence Structure	2.3	3.0	3.7
Coherence & Organization	2.1	2.8	3.5
Vocabulary & Language Use	2.5	3.2	3.8
Creativity & Detail	2.0	2.7	3.5
Adherence to Task	2.4	3.1	3.9
Fluency & Spontaneity (Free Stage)	2.2	2.9	3.6

Overall, the transition from controlled to free writing facilitated gradual skill development, ensuring that students did not feel overwhelmed. The combination of structured learning and personal creativity proved to be an effective way to improve writing proficiency in an EFL context.

4. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the Controlled to Free Approach, along with DIY "Daily Activities," had a positive impact on students' writing skills. The most notable improvement was observed in Vocabulary & Language Use (2.5 → 3.8). This suggests that students became more aware of their word choices and demonstrated a richer vocabulary range after being guided by the rubric. Exposure to different writing tasks and peer feedback also contributed to their enhanced word selection.

Grammar & Sentence Structure showed a significant increase (2.3 → 3.7), reflecting students' improved ability to construct grammatically correct sentences. This improvement aligns with the structured approach in Cycle 1, which provided explicit grammar instruction and controlled exercises before transitioning to independent writing.



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Creativity & Detail also demonstrated considerable progress (2.0 → 3.5), as students were encouraged to add vivid descriptions and personal experiences to their writing. The DIY "Daily Activities" played a crucial role in fostering engagement, allowing students to reflect on their routines and experiences creatively.

Additionally, Coherence & Organization (2.1 → 3.5) showed marked progress, indicating that students developed better structuring skills. The guided exercises in Cycle 1 helped establish a foundational understanding of logical sequencing, while the freer writing tasks in Cycle 2 allowed students to implement transitions and paragraph development more effectively. The findings also highlight improvements in Adherence to Task (2.4 → 3.9) and Fluency & Spontaneity (2.2 → 3.6). These results suggest that students became more confident in addressing writing prompts and expressing their thoughts naturally. The rubric served as a clear guideline, ensuring that students met the writing criteria while developing their personal writing style. Overall, the research findings underscore the effectiveness of using a rubric to clarify writing expectations and provide structured feedback. The gradual transition from controlled to free writing helped students internalize key writing principles while fostering creativity and independence. These results support the notion that combining structured guidance with meaningful, student-centered activities can significantly enhance writing proficiency in EFL learners.

5. Conclusion

The findings suggest that the Controlled to Free Approach, combined with DIY "Daily Activities," is effective in improving students' writing skills. The structured progression from guided to free writing helped students develop confidence and proficiency. Future research could explore the long-term impact of this approach and its application in different learning contexts. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate meaningful and student-centered writing activities to enhance learning outcomes.



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