

Improving Writing Fluency Through Free Writing Activities: An Experimental Study

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ABSTRACT

Writing fluency is an important aspect of English learning, yet many EFL students struggle to produce continuous and coherent texts because of anxiety, limited vocabulary, and a strong focus on accuracy. This study aims to examine whether free writing activities can improve students' writing fluency. A quasi-experimental design was used with two groups: an experimental group that received free writing treatment and a control group taught through conventional writing methods. Writing fluency was measured through pre- and post-tests focusing on speed, flow of ideas, and coherence. Data were analyzed using paired-sample and independent-sample t-tests. The results show that the experimental group made significant gains in writing fluency, producing longer and more connected texts, while the control group showed only slight improvement. These findings indicate that free writing is an effective strategy for reducing anxiety and encouraging continuous idea expression. Overall, the study highlights the value of fluency-oriented activities in strengthening students' writing competence.

Keywords: Free Writing; EFL Students; Experimental Study; Writing Instruction

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the essential skills in learning English that requires students to generate and organize ideas into coherent texts. Compared to speaking or listening, writing demands more complex abilities, such as vocabulary, grammar, and coherence. Many students, however, struggle to write fluently and often face difficulties in producing continuous text. This problem is commonly caused by their focus on grammatical accuracy rather than fluency. Consequently, their writing becomes slow, fragmented, and less communicative. Writing fluency has been defined as the ability to produce written text with speed, coherence, and continuity (Nation, 2009). Fluent writers can write longer texts within a limited time, whereas less fluent writers spend more time struggling with vocabulary or grammar. The

lack of fluency reduces students' confidence and hinders their ability to communicate ideas effectively. This issue is particularly evident in Indonesian EFL classrooms, where students are hesitant to write freely. Therefore, addressing writing fluency is an important aspect of language teaching.

One of the approaches to develop writing fluency is free writing. Free writing encourages students to write continuously for a specific time without worrying about mistakes. Elbow (1998) argued that free writing helps students overcome writer's block and focus on idea generation. By writing without constraints, students can explore creativity and develop fluency. In addition, free writing provides a supportive environment where students are not penalized for grammatical errors. Several scholars highlight the benefits of free writing. Jacobs (1986) stated that free writing promotes risk-taking and improves students' writing speed. Harmer (2007) emphasized that free writing activities motivate students to express ideas more confidently. In the Indonesian context, free writing can help reduce writing anxiety and make writing activities more enjoyable. This makes free writing a relevant method to improve students' fluency.

Although previous studies have examined the benefits of free writing, most of them focused on students' attitudes, motivation, or general improvement in writing ability. Few studies have specifically investigated writing fluency as a measurable outcome using controlled experimental methods. Moreover, limited research has explored free writing in Indonesian high school settings, particularly by comparing students' fluency development through pre- and post-tests. This study offers novelty by providing empirical evidence on how free writing directly affects measurable fluency indicators speed, idea flow, and coherence through a quasi-experimental design involving Indonesian EFL learners. Based on these considerations, the researcher intends to investigate whether free writing activities significantly improve students' writing fluency. By conducting an experimental study, the researcher expects to provide empirical evidence that free writing can be an effective method for teaching writing in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing Fluency

Writing fluency is the ability to produce continuous written text smoothly and effectively. Nation (2009) emphasized that fluency in writing involves speed, coherence, and ease of expression. Students who lack fluency often hesitate and struggle to find words, which leads to fragmented sentences. Fluency enables students to express ideas without being overly concerned about accuracy. Therefore, fluency plays an important role in overall writing competence. According to Hyland (2003), writing fluency is essential in academic contexts, where students must produce essays, reports, and assignments within limited time. Fluency helps students organize ideas quickly and communicate effectively. A lack of fluency reduces confidence and hinders performance in

academic writing tasks. Thus, developing writing fluency should be prioritized in EFL classrooms.

Free Writing Activities

Free writing is a technique where students write continuously without worrying about grammar, spelling, or organization. Elbow (1998) explained that free writing reduces writing blocks and allows ideas to flow naturally. Students can write on any topic for a set amount of time, focusing on idea expression rather than correctness. Free writing encourages creativity and reduces fear of making mistakes. Raimes (1983) highlighted that free writing builds confidence and motivation among students. By practicing free writing, learners develop their ability to think and write simultaneously. The activity shifts focus from accuracy to communication, which helps improve fluency. This makes free writing an effective tool for language teachers to foster fluency in writing.

Previous Related Study

Previous studies show that free writing positively impacts writing fluency. Jacobs (1986) found that students engaged in free writing produced longer texts and demonstrated better fluency compared to those who focused on grammar. Similarly, Elbow (1998) argued that free writing helps students overcome hesitation and generate ideas more effectively. In Indonesia, Fitria (2020) found that free writing improved EFL students' writing fluency and confidence. Putri (2021) also reported that students who practiced free writing regularly produced more coherent and fluent texts. These studies indicate that free writing is effective and applicable in EFL contexts such as Indonesian classrooms.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test control group. According to Creswell (2014), quasi-experimental research is appropriate when the researcher cannot randomly assign participants but still aims to investigate causal relationships. In this study, two groups of students were compared: one group received treatment through free writing activities, while the other was taught using conventional writing practice. The purpose of this design was to examine whether the use of free writing activities significantly improved students' writing fluency.

Before data collection, the validity and reliability of the writing test were ensured through several procedures. Content validity was established by aligning the test prompts and scoring rubric with theoretical indicators of writing fluency—speed, idea flow, and coherence based on Nation (2009) and Jacobs et al. (1981). To strengthen this, two experts in EFL writing assessment reviewed the test items and

confirmed that they were appropriate for measuring fluency. Reliability was ensured through inter-rater scoring, where two independent raters evaluated the students' writing using the same rubric. The scores were compared, and inconsistencies were discussed to reach agreement. A pilot test was also conducted with a small group of students to check clarity, scoring consistency, and test stability before administering the pre-test and post-test to the actual participants.

Instrument and Procedure

The main instrument in this research was a writing test designed to measure students' writing fluency. Both pre-test and post-test were administered to assess students' progress. The rubric for assessing writing fluency was adapted from Jacobs et al. (1981), focusing on the aspects of speed, flow of ideas, and coherence. Additionally, the researcher employed observation notes to monitor classroom participation and engagement during the treatment. According to Brown (2004), writing assessments should not only capture linguistic accuracy but also fluency, as fluency reflects the writer's ability to generate and connect ideas smoothly.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed quantitatively using paired-sample t-tests and independent-sample t-tests. The paired-sample t-test was applied to determine the improvement within each group (experimental and control) by comparing their pre-test and post-test scores. The independent-sample t-test was used to examine whether there was a significant difference between the two groups after the treatment. Ary, Jacobs, and Sorensen (2010) argue that these statistical techniques are appropriate in educational experiments to test the effectiveness of an instructional intervention. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 25 to ensure accuracy and reliability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Pre-test Results

Before the treatment, both experimental and control groups were given a pre-test to measure their initial writing fluency. The results indicated that the students in both groups had relatively low levels of writing fluency. The experimental group showed limited ability to generate ideas and often struggled to connect sentences into coherent paragraphs. Most students produced fewer than 100 words in 30 minutes, with frequent pauses and incomplete sentences. This suggests that students were more focused on accuracy than on fluency. Similarly, the control group's pre-test results also indicated low performance in writing fluency. Students' writings were characterized by short, fragmented sentences with minimal elaboration. The number of words produced was almost the same

as that of the experimental group, and students often hesitated when asked to write continuously. These results confirm that the majority of students at SMAN 5 Sorong had difficulties in maintaining fluency when writing in English before receiving the treatment.

Post-test Results

After six sessions of treatment, the post-test results revealed significant improvements in the experimental group. Students were able to produce longer texts with better idea development and smoother transitions. The average number of words increased to more than 160 words in 30 minutes, and their sentences were more connected and coherent. This indicates that free writing activities helped students reduce their fear of making mistakes and encouraged them to express ideas more freely. In contrast, the control group, which continued to use conventional methods, showed only slight improvements. While their grammar accuracy improved marginally, their writing fluency did not progress as significantly as that of the experimental group. The students still wrote in shorter sentences and often paused to think about grammar, which hindered the flow of their writing. This comparison suggests that free writing activities had a positive effect on improving writing fluency compared to traditional approaches.

The results of this study indicate that free writing activities played a significant role in improving students' writing fluency. This improvement can be understood more deeply through both theoretical reasoning and classroom observations conducted during the treatment process. From a theoretical perspective, free writing aligns with Nation's (2009) concept of fluency development, which emphasizes the need for learners to produce language rapidly and continuously without excessive attention to accuracy. Free writing creates conditions where students must sustain written output for a fixed period, which directly develops automaticity in idea generation and sentence construction. As students engage in continuous writing, cognitive resources shift from monitoring grammar to expressing ideas, allowing fluency to develop more naturally. This supports the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 2005), which states that learners gain fluency when they are pushed to produce language continuously and meaningfully.

Elbow's (1998) theory further explains why free writing is effective. He argues that writer's block and anxiety inhibit natural idea flow, causing students to hesitate and interrupt their own thinking. Free writing removes these barriers by encouraging students to write without fear of making mistakes. This theoretical claim was visible in the behaviour of students in the experimental group: during early sessions, many students paused frequently and hesitated to write, but in later sessions, they became more comfortable writing continuously, indicating reduced anxiety and increased confidence. Classroom observations during the treatment provided additional evidence. At the beginning of the study, students in the experimental group often stopped writing to erase words, consult dictionaries, or think too long about grammar. However, by the third and fourth sessions, students showed noticeable

behavioral changes. They wrote with fewer pauses, stayed focused longer, and filled more lines within the allotted time. These behaviours illustrate the gradual development of automaticity, as suggested by Harmer (2007), who states that repeated exposure to fluency-based tasks strengthens learners' ability to write more naturally and quickly.

Another important factor is the shift in students' mindset. Free writing allowed them to view writing as a process of expressing ideas rather than a test of grammatical correctness. This aligns with Raimes (1983), who argues that focusing solely on accuracy limits students' ability to develop fluency. In the control group, this tendency was evident: students frequently paused to correct grammar, resulting in shorter and fragmented texts. In contrast, students in the experimental group reported feeling more relaxed and motivated, which contributed to their ability to generate more ideas and write longer paragraphs.

The increase in word count and the smoother flow of sentences in the experimental group's post-test further demonstrated that free writing nurtures idea continuity. As Elbow (1998) notes, the act of writing freely encourages associative thinking—one idea naturally leads to another. This phenomenon was observed when students began to elaborate their ideas more fully, adding supporting details and transitions that were previously absent in their writing. Free writing improved students' fluency because it (1) reduced anxiety and encouraged spontaneous idea expression, (2) developed automaticity in generating and connecting ideas, (3) shifted attention away from accuracy toward communication, and (4) built confidence through repeated, uninterrupted practice. These theoretical and behavioral insights reinforce the conclusion that free writing is an effective method for enhancing writing fluency in EFL contexts.

The findings of this study demonstrate that free writing activities significantly improved students' writing fluency. The experimental group showed higher fluency scores in the post-test compared to the control group. This supports Nation's (2009) argument that fluency practice allows learners to focus on the speed and flow of writing rather than grammatical accuracy. By engaging in continuous writing without interruption, students were encouraged to generate ideas more freely and write longer texts. The results are consistent with Elbow (1998), who emphasized that free writing helps students bypass their inner critic, enabling them to write without fear of making mistakes. This process not only builds confidence but also enhances writing fluency. In this study, students who participated in free writing sessions reported feeling less anxious and more motivated to write, which aligns with Elbow's perspective.

Moreover, the improvement in writing fluency among the experimental group supports the findings of Raimes (1983), who suggested that fluency-based activities are essential for developing writing competence. Raimes argued that excessive focus on grammar often hinders students' ability to write fluently. Free writing gives learners opportunities for meaningful, uninterrupted output,

which strengthens fluency development. This was also observed in the control group, where students remained hesitant and produced shorter writings due to their concern with grammatical correctness. Additionally, the study confirms

Harmer's (2007) statement that writing fluency develops when learners are provided with opportunities to write continuously and regularly. The experimental group benefited from repeated exposure to free writing activities, which encouraged them to practice expressing ideas without constant monitoring of accuracy. This continuous practice created a habit of writing more spontaneously. Finally, the results of this study align with previous research by Fitria (2020), who found that free writing techniques significantly improved EFL students' ability to produce coherent and longer texts. Similarly, Putri (2021) reported that free writing activities increased students' motivation and reduced writing anxiety, leading to greater fluency. Taken together, these findings highlight that free writing is an effective instructional strategy for improving writing fluency in EFL contexts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that free writing activities have a meaningful impact on improving students' writing fluency. Free writing helps the students express ideas more freely, reduces their anxiety about making mistakes, and shifts their attention from accuracy to communication. This supports the perspectives of Elbow (1998) and Nation (2009), who argue that fluency develops when learners are encouraged to write continuously without excessive self-correction. The results highlight an important implication for teaching practice: writing instruction should balance accuracy with fluency. When teachers focus solely on grammar, students may become hesitant and less confident in expressing their ideas. Integrating free writing into classroom routines provides students with opportunities to build writing habits that are more natural, flexible, and motivated. Therefore, free writing can serve as an effective and practical strategy to promote writing fluency in EFL classrooms and should be considered a valuable component of fluency-oriented instruction.

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