# Using Think-Pair-Share for Writing Descriptive Texts

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**Abstract**

*Using the right technique to teach writing is very important to help students overcome problems in writing. Think Pair Share (TPS) is a cooperative teaching-learning method that it is believed to help students improve their writing ability. Thus, the writers conducted an experimental study to tenth grade students at a senior high school in Banda Aceh to find out whether or not this technique could facilitate and improve the students' writing of descriptive texts in English. The results showed that the TPS technique successfully improved the ability of students' in writing, reflected by the post-test scores covering five aspects of writing. The progress before and after the technique was implemented can be seen in these average scores for the five aspects: content increased from 12 to 16, organization from 11 to 15, vocabulary from 9 to13, grammar from 8 to 10, and mechanics from 8 to 11 where the improvement for each aspect was 4, 4, 4, 2 and 3. Despite the results showed that the TPS technique was effective for improving the students' mastery of organization, vocabulary and content, but less so for improving mechanics and grammar. This is probably because it is generally much easier to make improvements in organization, vocabulary and content but it requires a much longer effort with much more practice to significantly improve mechanics and grammar. Nevertheless, the writers suggest that English teachers and others can use the TPS technique to teach writing, hence some of the problems faced by students in writing can be helped and, more importantly, they can improve their ability to write English.*

**Keywords:** Think Pair Share, writing, descriptive texts.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Nunan (2003) has said that writing is a process of thinking to invent ideas, thinking how to express the ideas into good writing and thinking how to arrange it all into paragraphs properly and clearly. Writing is not only a physical act but also mental work which involves thinking and transferring ideas into written form with proper vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. Heaton (1998) clearly classifies five important elements in writing and he uses these elements to judge the quality of writing. Those elements are content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. To create good EFL writing, in Indonesia as a non-English speaking country, becomes a great challenge and it is difficult to achieve since students face many problems in writing especially regarding to fully understand all of those five aspects listed above.

Based on the second researcher's experiences during an internship program in a senior high school in Banda Aceh, the problems faced by the students in writing included: (a) it was difficult for them to find ideas to write about, (b) they lacked vocabulary and (c) they could not organize their ideas properly due to lack of comprehension of the ways to compose a text, (d) the students could not use/choose proper grammar, and (e) they misspelled words. Due to these problems, the students could not reach the school's passing grade (≥65).

In addition, since English is a foreign language here and writing is a complex skill, teachers here have to be more critical in finding and using better techniques for teaching it. For example, in teaching writing, there are several techniques that can be used by teachers. However, they need to be creative to choose which technique best suits the material that has to be taught. Cooperative learning, for instance, is considered as a proper method that can be used for teaching writing.

However, cooperative learning is still a general concept as there are several techniques under it. In regard to teaching writing, it is believed that the Think Pair Share (TPS) technique can improve students' writing. It is a technique that encourages and allows students to work cooperatively by giving them more time to think through questions using three distinct steps: think, pair, and share. Additionally, the TPS technique can increase personal communications that can help students to internally process, organize, and retain ideas (Pimm, 1987).

Regarding this issue, Syahputra and Ginting (2012) conducted a study in Medan on the implementation of TPS to improve eighth grade students' English writing in descriptive texts. A classroom action research of three cycles was used in carrying out the TPS technique in the teaching and learning process. In the first evaluation, the mean score of the students' test was 66.4375, and this increased to 78.125 in the second evaluation and further went up to 87.5625 in the third evaluation. Observation result revealed that the students showed good attitudes and responses during the TPS implementation in the classroom. The results from the questionnaire and interviews also revealed that the students agree to the application of TPS in helping them improve their writing in descriptive texts.

Moreover, Aseptiana (2013) did a research on the effectiveness of TPS for teaching and learning writing with second grade students in Malang. From this research, she found that the TPS technique was more effective than the traditional method of teaching and learning writing. Then, another research by Laini (2014) also intended to

figure out whether TPS could improve students' English writing in Denpasar. The subjects were eighth grade students. A classroom action research was used to implement TPS in two cycles. The results of the post-test in each cycle showed that there was significant improvement of the subjects' writing skill in descriptive texts. Furthermore, positive responses were also gained from the subjects on the use of TPS in the teaching and learning of writing.

In overall, the previous research has shown success in improving EFL students' English writing through the TPS technique in different cities in Indonesia. Therefore, the researchers in this study would also like to apply this technique to the students in Banda Aceh and see whether it has similar effect. Hence, the problem for this study was formulated as follows: Can using the Think Pair Share technique for teaching and learning writing improve the ability of year ten EFL students at a junior high-school in Banda Aceh to write better descriptive texts?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Writing

According to Nunan (2003, p. 88), "writing is the process of thinking to invent ideas, thinking about how to express them into good writing, and arranging the ideas into statements and paragraphs clearly". This means that while writing a text or a paragraph, students must follow two processes: thinking and arranging. Students must think about the ideas in their minds, and then they must try to arrange their ideas into good sentences and paragraphs.

### 2.2 The Process of Writing

Though writing is a complex skill, by following certain steps in writing, it is possible for students to master the skills. To produce effective writing, Oshima and Hogue (1999) propose some stages in the writing process, they are prewriting, planning, writing or drafting, revising the draft and final editing. They are explained below:

1. Prewriting:
   Prewriting is a step in which a writer starts to choose, focus and establish the topic. At this stage, as a part of preparing to write, the writer tries to gather/brainstorm information from any sources to develop ideas to support the topic.
2. Planning:
   After gaining sufficient information at the prewriting step, a writer tries to arrange/outline the information orderly (in a schematic structure). At this stage the ideas are categorized into manageable sub-topics and the writing is planned.
3. Writing/Drafting:
   In this stage, a writer starts composing the writing starting with a topic sentence followed by some sentences with detailed information. Here, the writer should follow the outline and maintain unity as well as coherence. Referring to the idea of unity and coherence, there are two important things to consider, namely the topic sentence (controlling the idea) and the supporting details. Also, the writer should concentrate on organizing her ideas into an introduction, a body, and a conclusion or summary.

4. Revising the Draft:
   At this stage the writer rearranges, changes, adds ideas, and eliminates irrelevant sentences in the writing, so that it will be a readable, understandable, and effective text.
5. Final editing:
   After all the steps above, the editing phase is required to check punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and grammar.

The role of the teacher in guiding students during these processes is also very important to maximize the results of the students' work.

## 2.3 Aspects of Writing

As underlined by (Heaton, 1998), there are five general components or main areas of writing:

1. Language use: the ability to write correct and appropriate collocations and sentences.
2. Mechanical skills: the ability to use correct conventions like punctuation and spelling.
3. Treatment of content: the ability to think creatively and to develop thought, excluding irrelevant information.
4. Stylistic skills: the ability to manipulate sentences and paragraphs and to use language effectively.
5. Judgment skills: the ability to write in a manner appropriate for a particular purpose with a particular audience, and the ability to select, organize, and order relevant information (rhetorical steps) with acceptable collocations.

Different from Heaton (1998), Baker (2011) divides writing into three components. Firstly, the grammatical skills, i.e. the ability to create meaningful, grammatically correct sentences. The next is compositional skills in which a writer has to have the ability to organize words to produce a composition and develop her ideas. The last is domain knowledge. This is an ability to construct and convey the information in an appropriate way. The writer must know to who the information is to be presented and must follow the communication conventions and jargon of her readers.

Based on these two opinions, it can be concluded that the aspects of writing are mostly linked to content, organization of ideas, mechanics and use of language, and judgmental skill or domain knowledge of the readers. Those components must be incorporated to produce a good, well written, meaningful piece of writing.

## 2.4 Descriptive Writing

According to the School-Based Curriculum in Indonesia, there are several kinds of writing texts that should be mastered by senior high school students. Descriptive texts are one of them; it is a genre of writing texts that is included in the syllabus for senior high school students. This means that they should be able to write a descriptive text accurately, fluently and acceptably as expected in the curriculum.

As defined by Gerot and Wignell (1995), a descriptive text is a text used to describe a particular thing, person, or place. According to Feez and Joyce (1998), the generic structures for a descriptive text are:

(1) A general statement: introducing the subject/topic, giving some general identifying information and showing what aspects of the thing, person or place will be described.

(2) A description: where information about the subject/topic is grouped into sections. While linguistic features of a descriptive text according to Feez and Joyce (1998) are as follows:

(a) specific nouns,

(b) simple present tense,

(c) detailed noun phrases to give information about the subject,

(d) various adjectives functioning to describe number or classify the subject,

(e) relating verbs to give information about the subject,

(f) thinking and feeling verbs to express personal opinions about the subject,

(g) action verbs,

(h) adverbials to give additional information about behavior of the subject, and

(i) figurative language like similes and metaphors.

By knowing and understanding the generic structure, the students can better concentrate on organizing their texts to the genre of their focus.

## 2.5 Think Pair Share

Think Pair Share (TPS) is a cooperative learning strategy that was first developed by Frank Lyman and his colleagues in Maryland in 1981 (Lyman, 1987). The name is derived from the activities/phases involved in the technique, namely: think, pair, and share. The three stages as proposed by Lyman (1987) are elaborated as follows.

1. Think

In this phase, the teacher provokes the students' thinking with a question and they can take a few moments to think about the question. This activity can promote the students' critical thinking to find a solution individually to the problem posed by the teacher (problem solving activity).

2. Pair

This stage gets students to work in pairs with their nearby neighbors, designated partners, or a desk-mate to discuss answers for the question given. Here they can compare their mental or written notes and identify the answers they think are best, most convincing, or most unique (working cooperatively).

3. Share

After the students have talked in pairs for a few moments, then the teacher calls for the pairs to share their thoughts with the rest of the class. She can do this by going around in a round-robin fashion, calling on each pair; or she can take answers as they are called out (or as hands are raised). Often, the teacher or a designated helper will record these responses on the board or on an overhead projector.

## 2.6 Advantages of Think Pair Share

Lyman (1987) then adds that TPS is helpful because it structures the discussion so that the students follow a prescribed process that limits off-task thinking and off-task behavior and builds accountability in their pair (each must report to a partner and the partners must report to the class). Moreover, the most important part of all stages of the technique, especially in the part think and pair is it engages shy students and helps to

scale up discussions with large classes. Besides, it also stretches students' thinking merely by its implementation and challenges them to articulate their thoughts to another person.

Finally, in can be inferred that the TPS technique is a procedure that allows students to prepare themselves by arranging things before they have to create the final product. In this technique, the students are given time to think and are guided to do things through questions posed by the teacher. After getting ideas, they also have time to discuss their ideas with their partner. Hence, in this pair phase they can build their ideas to be complex ones before sharing them to the rest of the class.

## 3. METHOD

### 3.1 Method

This study followed the steps for experimental quantitative research where one (or more) variables are varied and others are kept constant. The manipulated variable is called the independent variable whereas the observed and measured variable is called the dependent variable (Johnson & Christensen, 2010). Moreover, the design for this study was a one-group pre-test and post-test design in which $X_T$ was the treatment and $O_1$ and $O_2$ represent the pre-test and the post-test assessments. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006) have said that the success of the treatment can be verified by comparing the scores from the pre-test with those from the post-test.

This study was conducted at MAN Kuta Baro in Banda Aceh. The population of this research was all of the tenth grade students of the school. While the sample for this research was class X(A) with 14 students, which was selected by using a purposive random sampling technique (Gay et al., 2006).

### 3.2 Technique of Data Collection

The instruments for this research were tests. Thus, in collecting the data, the writer used the following steps of pre-test, treatment and post-test. They are described below:
1. Pre-test
   The pre-test was given at the first meeting to get the initial scores of the students before any treatment was given. The pre-test took 1 x 40 minutes and the students were asked to write a descriptive text individually without the teacher giving any explanations about it.
2. Treatment
   The treatment was given for 2 sessions of 40 minutes each. Here, the second researcher taught the students on how to use the TPS technique to improve their ability to write a descriptive text.
3. Post-test
   The post-test was given in the last meeting, also for 1 x 40 minutes, in order to know how far the writing ability of the students had improved as a result of using TPS. In this test, the students were again asked to write a descriptive text in pairs as the final step of the TPS/Write Pair Share technique. Then they were scored based on their final texts.

### 3.3 Technique of Data Analysis

After collecting the students' texts, the writers assessed them using a writing rating scale proposed by (Heaton, 1998). They were scored based on the criteria given on the scale. Then in analyzing the data and proving the hypothesis, the writers used statistics to calculate the means, standard deviations and the t-test.

As the final step of what was found, the following hypothesis is tested: "use of Think Pair Share can improve the ability of students to write better descriptive texts". The goal of hypothesis testing is to discover whether or not it is accepted or rejected, which further leads to answer the research question. The formula for hypothesis acceptance or rejection is as proposed by Arikunto (2006) below:

- If t-score < t-table, Ho is accepted and Ha is rejected
- If t-score > t-table, Ho is rejected and Ha is accepted

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Results from the Pre-tests and Post-tests

The results from this study were obtained from the data from the pre-tests and the post-tests. In the pre-test session, the students were asked to write a descriptive text about their mother. This activity was intended to find out the students' basic knowledge for writing a descriptive text. After getting the data from the pre-test, the students were given two treatments to implement the TPS technique for teaching writing of a descriptive text. To complete the data, the writer then conducted the post-test session to get the final scores for the students for their writing of a descriptive text after the TPS technique had been implemented.

The comparison of the pre-test and the post-test results is shown in Figure 1.
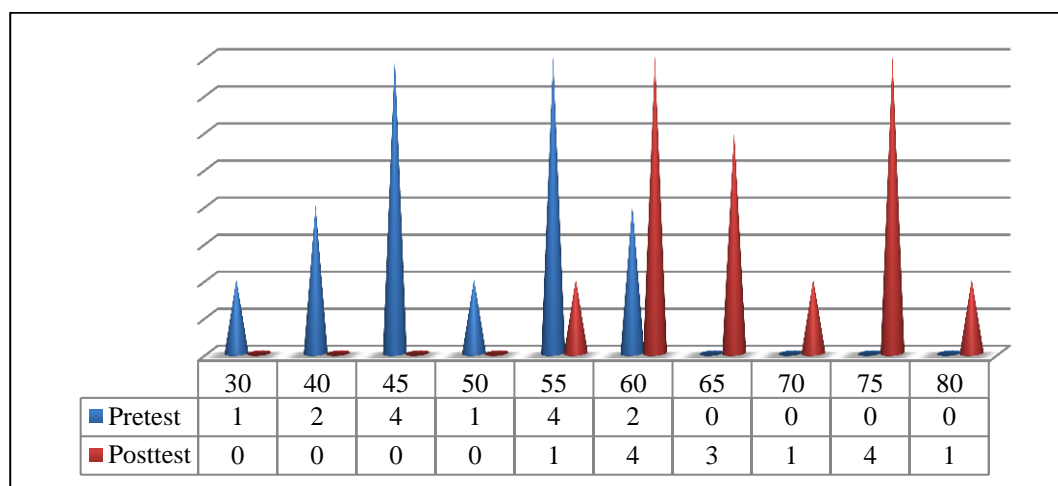


|  | 30 | 40 | 45 | 50 | 55 | 60 | 65 | 70 | 75 | 80 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pretest | 1 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Posttest | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 1 |

**Figure 1.** The students' scores from the pre-test and the post-test.

From Figure 1, it can be seen that from the pre-test results, of the 14 students who did the test most of them scored 45 and 55, while the rest got 30, 40, 50, and 60. The highest score was 60 and this did not even reach the standard score (passing grade = 65)

of the school. All of the achievements were far from the expected results. The mean score for the pre-test was 49.

In the post-test, the students' scored from 55 to 80. The mean score for the post-test was 67. This outcome was much more acceptable than the result from the pre-test as it reached the standard or passing grade of 65 set by the school. Furthermore, there was a significant different in what the students achieved before and after they learnt how to write a descriptive text using the TPS technique. In the pre-test, all the respondents scored 60 or less which did not reach the passing grade of 65. But, in the post-test, their scores made a considerable improvement, only 5 scored 60 or less, and most students (9 of them) reached the passing grade of 65.

## 4.2   The Application of the TPS Technique for Developing Writing Skills

The students' achievements following the implementation of the TPS Technique for teaching writing based on the results from the pre-tests and the post-tests are shown in Figure 2. The figure illustrates that the average scores after the students learned to write a descriptive text using TPS increased for each aspect. Content as the first aspect increased from 12 to 15, i.e. an improvement of 3 points. This means that students who had limited knowledge of writing a descriptive text at first had changed to become students with sufficient knowledge of the subject. In the aspect of organization, the average score went up from 11 to 15 an increase of 4 points indicating that the students become aware of how to state ideas clearly in their writing even though they were still somewhat choppy. For vocabulary, their average increased from 9 to 13, also an improvement of 4 points. Meanwhile, in grammar their scores improved from 8 to 10, an improvement of 2 points. Lastly the aspect of mechanics went up from 8 to 11, an increase of 3 points.
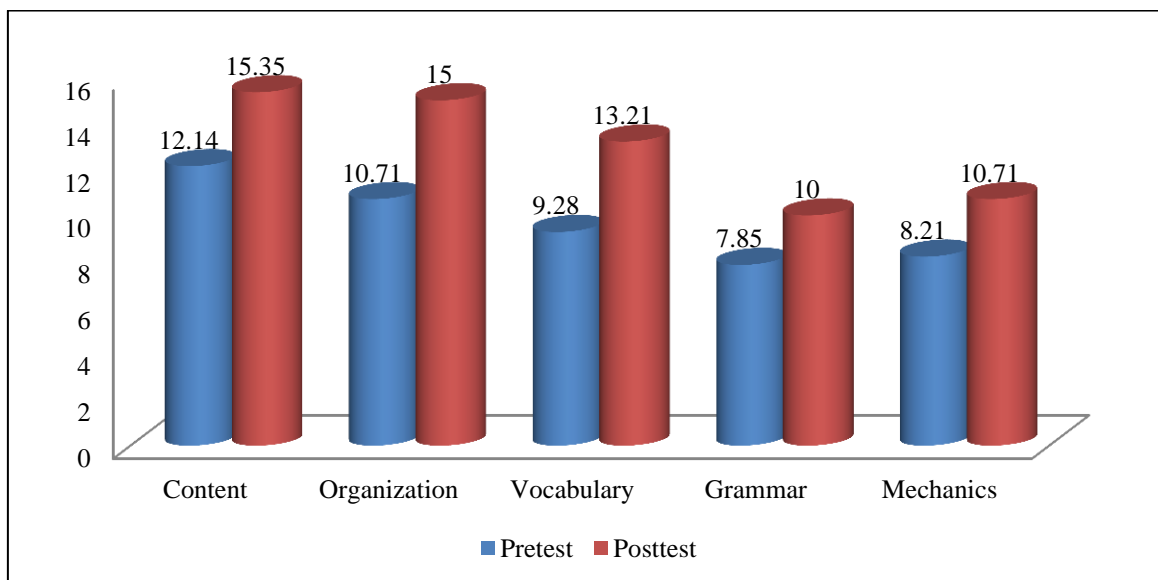


**Figure 2.** Average scores for content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics in the pre-test and post-test.

From all these comparisons it can be seen in Figure 2 that the biggest improvements were in organization and vocabulary which each increased by 4 points.

Thus after the students were trained to write a descriptive text through the TPS technique, they could more easily arrange their story and their ideas and their vocabulary properly. Then content improved by 3 or 4 points. According to the students, the reason why content improved was that they learnt how to describe things and what aspects of things to describe.

Mechanics and grammar, which improved by 3 points for the former and by 2 for the latter, reflected that the lowest improvement were in these aspects. Even though it was not a considerable change, but it was still an improvement. This condition might be caused by the students who only focused on the content of the text they write, and they were less aware of the little things of sentence construction and the conventions of grammar. Thus, they also often made simple errors in punctuation, spelling, and capitalization.

## 4.3 Discussion

For hypothesis testing as found from the calculations, the $t_{score}$ for the research results was 12.204, while the $t_{table}$ was 2.160. Thus $t_{score}$ is higher than $t_{table}$ ($t_{score}$ 12.204 > $t_{table}$ 2.160) which confirms that the alternative hypothesis is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected. As a result, the hypothesis that says "the useThink Pair Share can improve the ability of students to write better descriptive texts" was accepted. In other words, it can be said that the use of Think Pair Share technique overcomes most of the students' difficulties in a number of writing aspects in writing descriptive texts.

Improvements can be seen in each aspect of writing. Content improved by 3 or 4 points. This showed that the ability of the students to write a descriptive text improved from having little mastery of the subject to having a basic knowledge of it. For instance, in the pre-test, one student only wrote one simple sentence in his paper to describe his mother: *"My mother is house wife"*. From that sample, it can be inferred that that student had no knowledge of the content of a descriptive text and that he had no idea about what to write. But, in the post-test, that student could write much more than before by showing that he then had ideas about what to write, and could develop those ideas even though in a simple format.

Next is organization, which also improved by 4 points. At first, most of the students did not know how to organize their ideas. Some of them wrote a description first, then followed by identification. Also, they often arranged their ideas haphazardly, such as, *"she has long hair and she like cooking and her nose pointed"*. From this example, it can be seen that the ideas were not organized well. Besides, in regard to the aspect of vocabulary, at first the students frequently made mistakes in word form and choice. This can be seen in other examples found in the students' writing: (i) *4 child* instead of *4 children, (ii) trongger* instead of *stronger, (iii) whete* to indicate *white,* and so on. But, in the post-test after the TPS had been implemented, the students could organize their writing much better and use more appropriate vocabulary for describing their mothers.

What is more, even though the improvement in grammar was only 2 points, some progress could be seen in their post-test writing whereby they could construct correct sentences, though in simple form. For example, in the pretest, some of the students only used literal translations of phrases imported from their L1, e.g. *"my mother is name…"*, *"the first is I, she have a husband, her hair very black"*, etc. Meanwhile, in the post-test, they could better construct the simple forms into, *"my mother's name is…"*, *"my*

*mother's hair is black", "she is beautiful",* etc. Additionally, in the mechanical aspects, the students commonly made errors in spelling in the pre-test, such as *"exsotise"* for *"exotic".* Also, they usually made errors in capitalization and punctuation as shown in this example, *"She is beautiful. her hair…"* and so on. Fortunately, these errors decreased after they learned to write a descriptive text through the TPS technique.

Some of the errors in grammar and spelling from the pre-test and changes from the post-test are compared in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Errors in grammar and spelling from the pre-test and improvements in the post-test.

| No | Pre-test | Post-test |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | My mother is name….. | My mother's name is…… |
| 2 | She have a husband | She has a husband |
| 3 | Her hair very black | She has black hair |
| 4 | She have vlat nose | She has flat nose |
| 5 | Hair she is color black | My mother has black hair |

The research findings of this study is similar to the ones conducted by Syahputra and Ginting (2012), Aseptiana (2013) and Laini (2014), who also revealed that the TPS technique had improved their students' writing ability. All these outcomes showed that the use of TPS in teaching and learning writing could successfully overcome some of the difficulties that students face, such as the lack of ideas to write about, the difficulty to organize ideas, the lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, and so on.


## 6.    CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results discussed in the previous sections, the use of the TPS technique improved the ability of the tenth grade EFL students to write a descriptive text. This improvement was reflected in the improvement in the average scores for each aspect of writing: content (12 to 15 or 16), organization (11 to 15), vocabulary (9 to 13), grammar (8 to 10), and mechanics (8 to 11). To end with, the results showed that the TPS technique was effective for improving the students' mastery of organization, vocabulary and content, but less so for improving mechanics and grammar. This is probably because it is generally much easier to make improvements in organization, vocabulary and content but it requires a much longer effort with much more practice to significantly improve mechanics and grammar. Nevertheless, these average scores show that the ability of the students in each aspect was better compared to before the TPS technique was implemented.


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