

Improving the Students' Writing Skills by Integrating Problem-based Learning (PBL) with Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) Approach in Class 7. C of SMP-TQ Mu'adz bin Jabal

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Abstract: This study aims to improve students' writing skills by integrating Problem-based Learning (PBL) with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach in class 7. C of SMP-TQ Mu'adz bin Jabal. This study was collaborative Classroom Action Research (CAR), with a writing test, observation sheet, and e-questionnaire as research instruments. This study used three stages of statistical technique; first, measure the students' writing skills using a writing scoring rubric. Second, determine the category of students' scores. Third, find out the class percentage of writing score category where it can be said the student's writing skills in 7. C improves if 70% of the total students obtained a very good category (81-100) as their learning objectives achievement criteria in their writing assessment. The study result revealed that the % of students' writing score category in cycle one is 48%, then increased in cycle two is 74%. It concluded that the writing skills in class 7. C improves. Further study is recommended to investigate the PBL in improving other language skills such as listening, speaking, and reading to establish more conclusive findings on its roles.

2) **Keywords:** *problem-based learning, teaching at the right level, writing*

INTRODUCTION

In today's classrooms, it is commonly acknowledged that students have diverse academic achievement levels. It is common to discover that one student in the same class or learning group has different levels of knowledge and understanding from others. Therefore, for effective teaching and optimal learning outcomes, the teacher must accommodate this range of learning abilities. This approach aligns with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) concept.

In the early 2000s, economists Banerjee, Duflo, and Kremer conducted research that led to the conception of TaRL. Their research focused on the problem of low learning outcomes in education systems, particularly in developing countries. They conducted randomized controlled trials to assess the effectiveness of various learning interventions. Instead of relying on grade-level curriculum, their research found that tailoring instruction to each student's learning level could significantly enhance learning outcomes. Then, this concept became known as "Teaching at the Right Level," or TaRL.

Pratham, the Indian education-focused Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) led by Banerji, played a crucial role in implementing and scaling up TaRL. Banerji realized that many children could not read basic texts, which raised concerns about the effectiveness of the existing education system. It resulted in the development of the TaRL approach, which builds on Piaget's theory by emphasizing "what children can do, rather than what they should do." In other words, TaRL emphasizes the significance of tailoring instruction to students' cognitive development or achievement.

A teacher can conduct diagnostic assessments to address the diverse levels of academic achievement. This assessment provides valuable insights into the student's readiness and achievement levels. Diagnostic assessment can be formal or informal, employing tests, observations, interviews, or self-assessments. Through this assessment, teachers can gather data to inform their instructional decisions,

learning module design, material selection, media incorporation, and the arrangement of assessments in the classroom.

Based on the diagnostic assessment conducted in the early semester II at Class 7. C, it found the writing skills category was six students in the good category, six in the enough category, and 11 others needing guidance. So, in group learning, students can be grouped based on these categories. Then this assessment also revealed that students have difficulty expressing their writing ideas relevant to the topic given and writing the contents of the text according to the generic structure of the descriptive text. The students are also confused with linguistic elements of descriptive text, namely simple present tense. As a result, the students could not produce a wide-ranged writing composition.

To address those issues, one learning model used to improve the students' writing skills is Problem-Based Learning (PBL). PBL is one educational strategy that assists students in developing the reasoning and communication skills necessary for successful creativity. It is a learning model in which complex real-world problems facilitate student learning of concepts and principles rather than a direct presentation of facts and concepts (Sidauruk et al., 2020). Thus, the researchers conducted a Collaborative Classroom Action Research entitled *Improving the Students' Writing Skill by Integrating Problem-based Learning (PBL) with Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) Approach in Class 7. C of SMP-TQ Mu'adz bin Jabal*.

METHOD

This research applied collaborative Classroom Action Research (CAR) design that focused on improving students' writing skills by integrating Problem-based Learning (PBL) with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach in Class 7. C of SMP-TQ Mu'adz bin Jabal. In conducting this study, the researcher's collaborator was Mrs. R., an SMP-TQ Mu'adz bin Jabal English teacher from the beginning to the end of the research.

The learning stages of PBL adopted from Arends (2012) were used in this study that consisted of 5 stages: (1) the orientation of students to problems and hypotheses, (2) organizing students to learn, (3) guiding individual and group investigations, (4) developing and presenting the work, and (5) analyzing and evaluating the problem-solving process. Then, four writing aspects were measured in students' descriptive writing: content, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. The content of the text analyzed the topic's relevance and well-organized cover title, identification, and description. Grammar focuses on using linguistic features of descriptive text well, such as simple present tense.

The scoring of the vocabulary was determined by using a well-chosen vocabulary, sentence variety, and information. At last, the mechanics of the writing was judged on the effectiveness of capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and formatting. Two raters performed the ratings to avoid the subjectivity of the test results. The first rater was one of the English teachers in the school, while the second rater was the first author of this article.

The instruments used in this study were writing tests, observation sheets, and an e-questionnaire. A writing test evaluated the students' writing skills regarding Descriptive Texts on School Extracurricular. Meanwhile, observation sheets were used to observe the students' activity during the teaching-learning process. Then, an e-questionnaire was used to find out the students' responses to the learning process in the classroom. In this study, the researchers used statistical techniques to measure the improvement of students' writing skills by integrating the Problem-based Learning (PBL) model with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach.

There were some stages involved in this technique, and they were: *First*, the researchers measured the students' writing skills by using a writing scoring rubric. *Second*, the researchers used the students' criteria to determine the category of students' score as follow:

Table 1. Writing Score Category

Score Range	Category
0-60	Need Guidance
61-70	Enough
71-80	Good
81-100	Very good

(Kemendikbudristek, 2022,p.104)

Third, the researchers were tempted to find the class percentage of students’ writing category after gaining the data. In this case, the researchers used the formula below:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Hatch & Farhady, 1982, p.46)

Explanation:

P = percentage

F = frequency

N = number of groups

Through this formula, the researchers could identify the success of integrating Problem-based Learning (PBL) with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach in students' writing skills.

This collaborative Classroom Action Research (CAR) was conducted based on Lewin’s Action Research Cycle model that consisted of planning, implementing, observing, analyzing, and reflecting, shown as follows:

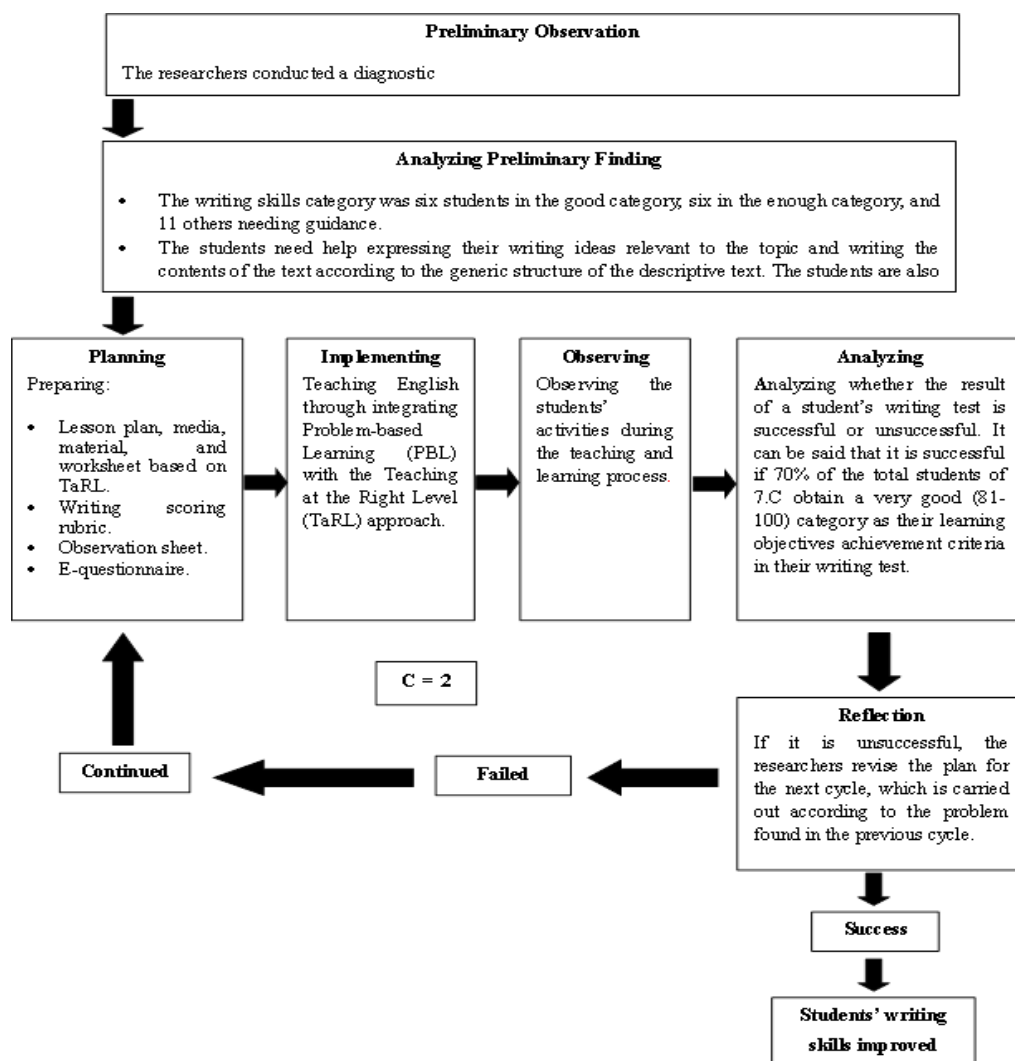


Figure 1. Lewin's Action Research Cycle, From Action Research in Retrospect and Prospect, p. 29, by Stephen Kemmis, 1990.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The finding of cycles one until two and the discussion of the study presents below:

Data Finding of Cycle One

As set before, the student's writing skills in 7. C improve if 70% of the total students 7. C obtained a very good category (81-100) as their learning objectives achievement criteria in their writing assessment. Thus, the researchers calculated the class percentage to determine how many percentages obtained a very good category. Moreover, the data distribution and percentage of students' writing score category in cycle one can be seen in the table below:

Table 2. Data Distribution of Students' Writing Scores in Cycle One

No	Score	Category	Number of Students
1.	88	Very good	11
	81		
2.	75	Good	5
3.	69	Enough	3
4.	50	Need Guidance	4
Total			23

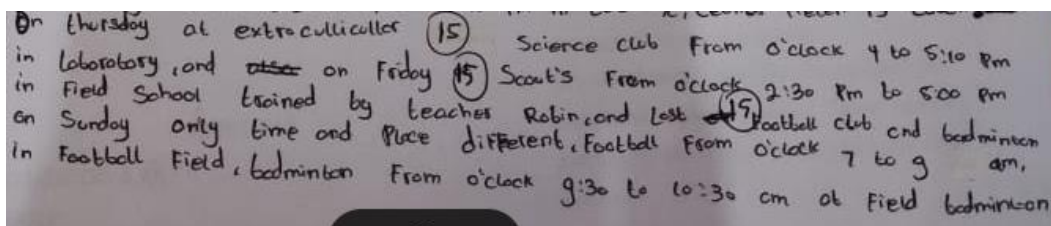
Table 3. Percentage of Students' Writing Score-Category in Cycle One

Category	Percentage
Very Good	48%
Good	22%
Enough	13%
Need Guidance	17%
Total Percentage	100%

Based on the data in Table 2. shows that, in cycle one, 11 students out of 23 could obtain a very good category (81-100) in their writing test. The % is 48%, which indicates the students' writing skills in 7. C cannot achieve the class percentage of the writing score category, namely the very good category (81-100), yet is 70%. Thus, it needed to be improved on cycle two.

By analyzing the finding above and connecting with the result of observation, the researchers could see two problems that improved the writing skills not maximal, and could not reach the criterion of success in cycle one. The first relates to the implementation of integrating Problem-based Learning (PBL) with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach in the classroom, and the second is to the result of the writing test.

While integrating the problem-based Learning (PBL) model with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach, the researchers noticed that SSS, AM, and IMA could not participate actively in the group. While the result of the writing test showed that SSS, NMS, NBSP, AM, HZA, and IMA could not use simple present tense correctly, such as shown in NMS's writing as follows:



Dealing with those problems, the researchers planned to take revised action to solve the problems of cycle one in cycle two. The revised action was to maximize the students' participation in a group activity by monitoring them frequently. In addition, massive reinforcement was also essential to make the students more confident to ask questions or give opinions during learning. Then, the researchers also emphasized using simple present tense in the writing process.

Data Finding of Cycle Two

Data distribution and percentage of students writing score category in cycle two can be seen in the table below:

Table 4. Data Distribution of Students' Writing Scores in Cycle Two

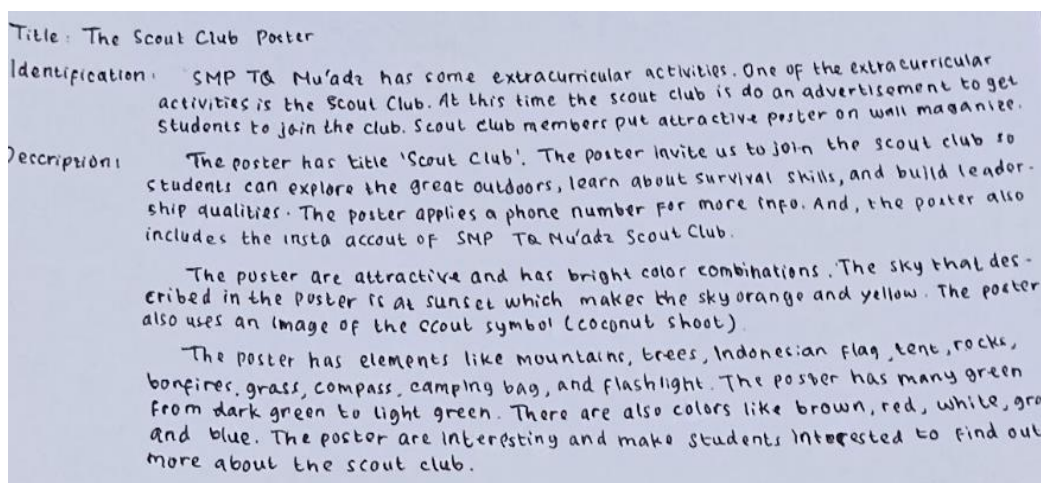
No	Score	Category	Number of Students
1.	94	Very Good	17
	88		
	81		
2.	75	Good	4
3.	63	Enough	1
4.	50	Need Guidance	1
Total			23

Table 5. Percentages of Students' Writing Score-Category in Cycle Two

Category	Percentage
Very Good	74%
Good	18%
Enough	4%
Need Guidance	4%
Total Percentage	100%

Table 4. shows that 17 students out of 23 could obtain a very good category (81-100) in their writing test. Thus, the % of students' category in cycle two is 74%. It indicated that the student's writing skills in 7. C achieves % class percentage of the writing score category, namely 70%.

By analyzing the result of the writing test and connected with the result of the observation sheet in cycle two, the students improved their writing skills. Most students were enthusiastic about learning; they could participate actively and work cohesively in the group. Furthermore, the students could ask questions and give opinions bravely. Further, the students also could write Descriptive Text well. It could be seen from the NPZ's writing.



The text above presents the information in well-chosen details across the paragraph, with good vocabulary choice and few grammar errors that do not interfere with understanding. As mentioned above, class 7. C class in cycle two could achieve a very good category (81-100) in their writing test, namely 74%. It was indicated that the students in class 7. C obtained the class percentage of the writing score category, namely 70%. Thus, the researchers ended this study in cycle two because it was enough to prove that integrating Problem-based Learning (PBL) with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach in the classroom could improve writing skills.

The students' writing test showed an improvement in the students' writing skills from cycle one to cycle two after being treated through the integrating Problem-based Learning (PBL) with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach in the classroom. It could be proven by looking at the % of students' writing score category. In cycle one, 11 students out of 23 could obtain a very good category (81-100) in their writing test, where the class percentage was 48%, which increased to 26% in cycle two, where 17 students obtained a very good category (81-100). Thus, the % of students' writing score category in cycle two was 74%.

Several factors cause the improvement of students' writing skills in this study. First, PBL has learning stages that can influence the skills to write descriptive text, which are in the third and fourth phases, namely investigating, developing, and presenting. Student creativity in finding data independently and in groups through direct observation makes writing the text easily (Cheong et al., 2019). Students' writing skills increase after going through the stages of investigation or investigation, individually and in groups (Imelda et al., 2019).

It found that the students could work well within their group, sharing ideas related to the topic discussed. These invariably generated more ideas for writing content, and they were able to complete the writing exercise. As mentioned by IMA in her e-questionnaire.

5. Tuliskan pengalamammu atau perasaan mu ketika bekerja sama dengan kelompok
Bahasa Inggris mu!

Saat saya sedang bekerja kelompok dengan kelompok saya, saya sangat merasa terbantu karena dapat berdiskusi dan saling bertukar jawaban

Add individual feedback

(When I was working in groups, I felt helped because I could discuss and exchange answers)

During the learning process, the students engage in group discussions, share ideas, and provide feedback to one another. It empowers the students to gain new knowledge or ideas to improve their writing. It aligns with the study by Sutrisna and Juliari (2019) and Sidauruk and Silalahi (2020), who said collaborative writing in PBL can significantly improve students' writing skills.

During group discussions, the students also can learn several vocabulary from her/his group members, as mentioned by ZRR:

5. Tuliskan pengalamanmu atau perasaan mu ketika bekerja sama dengan kelompok Bahasa Inggris mu!

Saya senang bekerja sama dengan kelompok, karena kt dapat berdiskusi mengenai hal atau kosakata bahasa inggris yang kita tidak tahu, mencari jawaban dan kosakata yang benar serta dapat lebih mudah memahami materi yang di berikan guru bahasa inggris

Add individual feedback

(I like working with groups because I can discuss things or unknown English vocabulary, look for answers and correct vocabulary, and more easily understand the material given by the English teacher).

Thus, group interaction helps the students enrich their idea relevant to their writing and increase their vocabulary. Second, PBL encourages metacognitive processes, such as reflection and self-assessment, which contribute to developing English descriptive writing skills. Through PBL, especially in analyzing and evaluating in the last phases of PBL, students can evaluate their writing by identifying strengths and weaknesses; they can reflect on feedback from their group members and assess their progress towards achieving their writing goals. By engaging in self-assessment, students become more aware of their writing abilities. They can take targeted actions to enhance their English writing skills (Lim, 2017) because, during editing, they could also improve the content and organization of their writing, not only spelling and punctuation mistakes.

Third, individualized instruction, as mentioned in the background of the study, the students of class 7. C possesses diverse levels of knowledge and understanding of English. Some students have a solid foundation, while others have significant knowledge gaps. Implementing TaRL in the classroom could recognize these differences, which allows tailoring the instruction and differentiating the teaching strategies to cater to individual needs (Tomlinson, 2017).

Thus, the lesson plan, media, material, and worksheet have been designed and implemented focused on each student's specific needs, allowing for personalized and targeted support. Identifying the specific areas where students require improvement in writing can provide individualized instruction that addresses their specific challenges. This approach enables students to receive focused feedback, practice, and support in grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and organization, leading to improved writing skills. This study finding aligns with Cahyono's (2022) study that explained that the Teaching at Right Level (TARL) method could improve students' learning outcomes.

A study conducted by Juwono and Sucahyo (2023) enriched the research of TaRL. Implementing TaRL in students' learning could make students happy because it was collected according to their ability levels, and students liked working together in groups to complete the given tasks. In order words, the TaRL approach can increase students' learning motivation. Some studies such as Rosmayanti and Yanuarti (2018), Rahardjo and Pertiwi (2020), Widiyawati, Muth'im and Nasrullah (2020), Manangkari (2020), Mastur and Suriaman (2021), Atma, Azahra, Mustadi and Adina (2021), Julian, Rohmana, and Agustina (2022) have proven the significant relationship between students motivation and their learning achievement.

Based on the findings and discussion above, the implementation of integrating Problem-based Learning (PBL) with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach in class 7. C of SMP-TQ Mu'adz bin Jabal is successful in two cycles.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the elaboration above, integrating Problem-based Learning (PBL) with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach improves the writing skills in class 7. C of SMP-TQ Mu'adz bin Jabal is successful in two cycles. The % of student's writing skills in the very good category (81-100) in cycle one is 48%, then it increases in cycle two is 74%. It indicates that the writing skills in 7. C achieves a % class percentage of students' writing score category, namely 70%. Since the present study has limitations regarding sample size where the sample is female students, thus it is recommended that further study covers larger samples. It is also recommended to investigate the PBL in improving other language skills such as listening, speaking, and reading to establish more conclusive findings on its roles.

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