IMPROVING STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS THROUGH WRITING WORKSHOP: AN ACTION RESEARCH

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Article Info	Abstract
	The present study aims at finding out how writing workshop improves the students' writing, particularly their grammatical and mechanical writing skills. The approach, which consisted of three stages starting from mini-lesson, writing, and sharing, was implemented on 28 students who took the Writing II Course. An observation checklist, test, field notes, and questionnaire were administered to collect the data in this collaborative action research. The findings of the study revealed that the implementation of the writing workshop was successful in reaching the objective after the revision and the modification were made to conduct cycle two. After reshuffling the format of the workshop to be mini-lesson, sharing, and independent writing, improvements were seen in students' writing. Furthermore, most of the students stated that working in a group allows them to learn more about using proper grammar and punctuation in writing. Related to the limitations of the study, recommendations for implementing a writing workshop for future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Writing, along with listening, speaking, and reading, is one of the abilities students have to master when learning a language. It is a productive skill in the written form that requires not only the graphic depiction of speech but also the development and presentation of ideas in a systematic manner, making it more complicated than it seems at first. Besides giving students a chance to be adventurous with the language reinforce learning, writing activity makes students very involved with the new language to later reflect on ideas and reevaluate them. (Klimova, 2013; Raimes, 1983)

A rich literature (Akkaya & Aydin, 2018; Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016; Kellogg, 2001; Wirantaka, 2016) asserts certain characteristics, such as good content, organization, language use, grammatical use, and mechanical consideration, are unquestionably required for successful writing. The material must include substantive development of the core idea, adequate and relevant supporting detail, and demonstration of topic knowledge. The arrangement comprises fluent expression of not choppy or abrupt concepts, logical sequencing, and cohesiveness; essential points and supporting facts are clearly and succinctly conveyed. The ideas are not confusing and unconnected. The advanced range is encircled by the effective use of words and idioms in the lexicon. Grammatical errors must not confuse the grammatical use. Furthermore, mechanic components govern knowledge of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization rules.

Writing is distinct from speaking. When speaking, facial and body gestures help the listener understand what the speaker says. The speaker's voice tone and stress can impact the meaning of uttered words. In writing, however, this is not the case. The writer cannot expect the reader to understand what he has or believes in his mind based solely on the words. Experts (Aguirre-Munoz et al., 2015; Crossley et al., 2014; Cutler & Graham, 2008; Shaw, 1986) confirm that correct grammar and mechanics are important elements of writing instruction writing quality to help the reader to understand. The importance of grammar and mechanics cannot be overstated because they directly impact the success or failure of communicating ideas from writer to reader. Without them, written language is unable to identify or replicate some distinct and distinct characteristics of speech. They are unquestionably necessary for a language because they contribute to making the language a tool of communication capable of revealing what it means by bringing the right kind of expression into writing for which intonation, volume, tone, and pauses are used while speaking.

Grammar and the mechanical characteristics of writing have been one of several researchers' primary focuses while doing the study. Xavier et al. conducted an action research study in 2020 to investigate teachers' comments on combining grammar and writing in the

writing class. After receiving training to improve their grasp of grammar as a meaning-making resource, the instructors were asked to report on their experience participating in the project. The results suggest that the action research approach increased instructors' grammatical subject knowledge, comprehension of students' writing gaps, and teaching strategies in the writing class. Another study was conducted by Calanoga (2019) to determine predominant writing errors, specifically mechanics and grammar. It revealed that students' most troublesome uses of mechanics and grammar serve as baseline data to design incidental lesson focus along with the aspects of mechanics and grammar that need to be dealt with by teachers. Due to students' limited competence in applying mechanics and grammar, incidental lessons were given to improve the language proficiency of the students. Crossley et al. (2014) investigated the links between expert human judgments of text quality and grammar, as well as mechanical faults in student writing. They gathered a corpus of W-Pal essays produced by high school students to code for grammatical and mechanical problems. After scoring, they discovered modest relationships between grammatical mistakes and holistic essay scores and greater relationships between mechanics and holistic essay scores. In 2013, Salem analyzed the effects of using a program based on the writing workshop approach on developing functional writing skills of pre-service teachers of English in the Hurgada faculty of Education. A teaching program based on the writing workshop approach and other supporting instruments was constructed and validated. The study involving forty prospective English teachers found that the writing workshop-based program had significant effects on improving the subjects' functional writing skills.

The previous studies mentioned above indicate that grammatical and mechanical skills are still issues in student writing. Among the strategies implemented to improve students' writing, the writing workshop has been proved to write performance better as it offers a larger number of process-writing strategies and more time to practice writing (Brookhart, 2007; Heitin, 2016). In 2006, Calkins introduced the framework of the writer's workshop that opens with a mini-lesson, followed by independent writing, and closes with sharing time. Lain (2017) supports this by summarizing the benefits of implementing a writing workshop in four categories: time, ownership, feedback, and community. As student writing improves with practice, the workshop is believed to be able to hone the writing skills or any aspects of writing as it offers plenty of time for students to write. During the workshop, the students are given a chance to explore genres and topics and experiment with organization, voice, and sentence choices which are also claimed to attract their engagement in their learning, leading to improved performance (Poll, 2014). The workshop also involves feedback from teachers or peers. It may improve students'

work and maybe the whole school. The workshop has the potential of improving a sense of community in a classroom that offers opportunities for students to bond through their shared writing.

With the subject of finding a lack of studies that offer practical implications for the writing workshop, particularly its influence on the aspects for improving students' grammatical and mechanical writing skills as well as their engagement in the learning process, the present research was designed to fill in the gaps in the literature by administering action research. The students of the Writing II Course were chosen to be the participants of the study. Based on the preliminary study, the students' problems in writing that deal with grammar and mechanics also occurred. Hence, it is worth conducting research dealing with the problems so that the students get the benefits of mastering grammatical and mechanical writing skills to assist themselves on the higher level of writing subject in the following semesters, especially in writing a thesis. Furthermore, through the use of action research that allows for repeated cycles of planning, observing, and reflecting, the teacher has the opportunity to understand and improve the quality of actions in English writing instruction resulting in higher student accomplishment and more effective learning communities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
A Writer's Workshop Approach

In writing, the use of words, appropriate grammar, mechanics, and organization of ideas determine how the ideas are expressed in the written mode (Brown, 2001; Gebhard, 2000). Developing ideas in the process of writing takes place in three stages—pre-writing, writing, and post-writing (McWhorter, 2001). In pre-writing, ideas can be generated through brainstorming, reading literature, and creating life maps, webs, and story charts. After collecting ideas, a writer gets their ideas on paper. A first draft expresses the ideas in sentence form and focuses on developing each more fully. In this stage, grammar, spelling, and punctuation are not the focus yet. In the post-writing stage, a writer usually evaluates the draft, particularly on the ideas, and may proceed to revise the texts by changing, deleting, or rearranging some of them and adding to them. After all the rethinking of ideas and other revisions are done, it comes to proofreading, which is checking for errors, and final polishing the work. Finally, after discussing the final copy with the teacher, the final draft is ready to produce.

Based on the purpose of the study, which focuses on improving students' grammatical and mechanical skills, the current study implements a writer's workshop approach (Calkins, 2006) to teach the writing process. Each period of the writer's workshop carries out the following format: mini-lesson, independent writing, and sharing. Previous studies (Lain, 2017; Poll, 2014) highlight the advantages of establishing the workshops regarding time, ownership, feedback, and community. Because student writing improves with practice, the workshop is said to be able to refine writing abilities or any component of writing because it provides ample time for students to write. Hence, not only the feedback given by teachers and peers but also the opportunity to explore genres and themes and experiment with organization, voice, and sentence choices, are believed to be able to increase students' involvement in their learning and lead them to higher performance.

A mini-lesson is a brief lesson that focuses on a specific topic for which pupils require assistance. It is critical since mini-lessons are the most typical method of offering explicit writing instruction. A mini-lesson is a teacher-led discussion of a single writing concept. Independent Writing is the phase for the students to write. The teacher allows the pupils to write and practice applying what they have learned in the mini-lessons. As the students get into a rhythm of writing, the instructor will meet with them individually for conferences or with a small group of writers for a guided writing session. Other than writing time, sharing is the most instructional beneficial component of the class since students are impacted considerably more by their peers. As authors, the students read their work and solicit comments from their audience. Students collaborate in groups to engage and exchange information about what they have written. Furthermore, as Stone (1990) mentioned, sharing may be utilized effectively to incorporate a language arts curriculum as a cooperative learning activity. It can be done in a variety of ways. The following are examples of sharing activities: Jigsaw, Think-Pair-Share, Roundtable, and Pairs Check.

There is evidence that as a student-centered framework for teaching writing, a writer's workshop offers an effective teaching approach to writing for its regular and predictable timetabling so that students can anticipate, prepare and plan for their writing (Calkins, 1994). Calkins & Ehrenworth (2016) support this by positing that writers require protected time to write, choice over their topics, and response from a community of writers in the writing process. Time, choice, and response have been believed to be the enduring elements of good writing instruction (Murray, 1968).

Many previous studies have also reported the implementation of writer's workshops in writing classes. Al-Hroub et al. (2019) performed action research to investigate the differences

in the impact of the 'writers' workshop' method on the second language writing skills of upper-primary pupils with diverse writing abilities. The writers' workshops were held twice a week for eight weeks, with 31 fifth-grade children participating. To assess writing improvement, an opinion essay was given as a pre-test and a post-test. The study's findings revealed improved students' writing-related outcomes across all writing ability categories. Salem evaluated the benefits of adopting the writing workshop technique on building functional writing abilities of pre-service English teachers in Hurgada, Faculty of Education, in 2013. A training program was developed and verified based on the writing workshop technique, a checklist of functional writing abilities skills and subskills, and a pre-posttest of functional writing skills. After taking a functional writing abilities pretest, forty prospective English instructors were randomly allocated to an experimental group and taught writing utilizing the writing workshop technique. The study's findings demonstrated that the writing workshop-based program enhanced participants' functional writing skills. In addition, Christopher et al. (2000) carried out research to investigate how a writer's workshop improved inadequate writers in fourth and fifth grade. After conducting a mini-lesson, the teacher provided 30 to 40 minutes of writing time, allowing students the flexibility to work in the writing process. They self-edited for mechanics and organization, then peer-editing using a student checklist. After that, they had a conference with the teacher to evaluate progress before revising and publishing their writing. This study stated that post interventions data indicated an increase in mechanical and organizational writing skills by the targeted students. In addition, through the post-self-writing reflection, students also demonstrated an internalized satisfaction with their writing.

METHOD

This section begins with the descriptions of the research design, setting, participants, and the research procedure of the study. The instruments are also elaborated on at the end of this section.

Research Design

This action research was conducted according to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), which included two cycles involving planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. The planning step concentrated on how to put up a teaching and learning approach that would be utilized to solve issues in the classroom. The method was adopted at the acting stage. The observation stage involves gathering data on the strategy's outcomes. Finally, during the reflection stage,

conclusions were reached, and the original plan was updated based on the findings, allowing a new cycle to begin.

Setting and Participants

The present study was conducted in the researcher's writing class in the English Education Department of a private university in East Java, Indonesia. It involved 28 students who take Writing II Course. This course was offered in the third semester after the students passed the Writing I Course. In recruiting the participants, non-probability sampling was employed based on naturally occurring groups. According to Jupp (2006), convenience sampling, which is used alongside action research, essentially refers to the idea of using a sample that is convenient to the team of researchers, such as a classroom or a school.

Research Procedure

This present research was conducted in the classroom with the steps proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). The procedures involved four main steps. They were planning, implementing the action, observing, and reflecting, as displayed in the figure below.
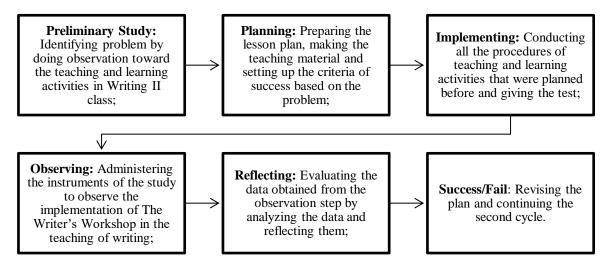
Preliminary Study: Identifying problem by doing observation toward the teaching and learning activities in Writing II class;	→	**Planning:** Preparing the lesson plan, making the teaching material and setting up the criteria of success based on the problem;	→	**Implementing:** Conducting all the procedures of teaching and learning activities that were planned before and giving the test;
Observing: Administering the instruments of the study to observe the implementation of The Writer's Workshop in the teaching of writing;	→	**Reflecting:** Evaluating the data obtained from the observation step by analyzing the data and reflecting them;	→	**Success/Fail**: Revising the plan and continuing the second cycle.

Figure 1: The Procedures of Action Research in the Present Study

As mentioned above, the stage of this action research began with a preliminary study. Here, the observations of the teaching and learning activities in the Writing II Course were done to verify the problem occur in that class. The results of the observation showed that the students had problems in writing that dealt with using incorrect grammar and mechanics, like the use of the apostrophe for plural, missing commas, superfluous, and misplaced punctuation. Given the situation, procedures of the action research were done starting from the planning, implementing the action, observing, reflecting, and revising the plan for the second cycle as the first cycle did not succeed.

Before doing the action, a model of learning strategy was designed. Dealing with the purposes of the present study, a writer's workshop approach by Calkins (2006) consisting of mini-lesson, independent writing, and sharing was implemented in Writing Class to improve students' grammatical and mechanical skills. After equipping the students with a short lesson about English grammar and kinds of punctuation marks and their functions, students were given chances to apply what they learned in the mini-lesson in the second stage, independent writing. In this study, the format of the writing was a completion test. The students were asked to complete the well-written text in which all of the punctuation marks were dropped and revise the grammar inappropriately used. Then, in the sharing session, they did peer editing to receive a different perspective on their writing. This activity led to self-evaluation, an integral part of the writer's workshop. Hence, after all the stages were done, it came to conferencing to encourage students to show what they knew and gain a clearer picture of where their writing was headed. The final stage of the cycle was to evaluate the actions. When the results of the first cycle did not meet the criteria of success, some improvements and revisions of the planning and action should be made before moving on to the second cycle.

Instruments

Below are the explanations of the kinds of instruments used in this study. They are tests, observation checklists, field notes, and questionnaires. The table below contains the types of instruments and the details.

Table 1. Kinds of Instruments Used in the Present Study

Kinds of Instruments	Objectives	Contents	The technique of Data Analysis
Test	To gain the students' score	A well-written text with fifty items of punctuation dropped	Scoring the students' grammar and mechanics tests based on the answer key
Observation checklist	To document the students' active engagement in the action	The acts of the teacher and students during the action, as well as their qualifications, are listed here	Completing the students' observation checklists by marking the qualification with a checkmark (√) based on the data obtained
Fieldnotes	To document the students' active engagement in an action that is not covered by the observation checklist.	Some items about the good points and some points to be improved after the action is done	Making notes based on the data gained in the field
Questionnaire	To record the students' reactions to the	Some statements and choices of the students' responses towards the use of grammar	Concluding the students' responses to the questionnaire by

	use of grammar and punctuation in writing and the application of the writer's workshop to develop grammatical and mechanical writing abilities	and punctuation in writing and towards the implementation of the writer's workshop to improve grammatical and mechanical writing skills	assigning the percentage to every students' response

As stated in the table above, participants were given a test in which the scores were interpreted using the Criterion Reference (Djiwandono, 2008). The criteria were determined based on the criteria group's achievement. The criteria group refers to a group of people who are considered to master the object of the test. The group consisted of 10 English lecturers from three universities in East Java and Bali. After doing the test, it was found that the highest score achieved by the criteria group was 92 from the maximum possible score of 100. The lowest score was 70 from the minimum possible score of 0. One person achieved the highest score of 92, another got 86, the other three got 84, the other two got 82 and 80, two people got 72, and the other got 70. Then, since the standard deviation is 7, the scores were categorized into four: very good (A) was for 81 – 92, good (B) was for 72 – 80, average (C) was for 63 – 71, and poor (D) was for 62 or less. The Criteria are stated on the Standard of Scoring below.

Table 2. The Standard of Scoring

Score	Category	Qualification
81 – 92	A	Very good
72 – 80	B	Good
63 – 71	C	Average
62 or less	D	Poor

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the results after conducting two cycles of classroom action research. It also delivers a discussion that covers the implications of the study and recommendations for future research.

Results of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2

Based on the findings of the students' observations during the teaching and learning process, it can be concluded that the students did not actively participate in the class activity, which caused them to fail the exam. In cycle 1, more than 70% of students had below-average results, which amounted to 20 out of 28 pupils. Furthermore, the findings of the field notes

revealed that the kids did not participate in-class activities. The researcher proceeded to the next round because the success criterion had not yet been met.

The failure of the writer's workshop (Calkins, 2006) implementation during the first cycle was due to a few fundamental issues. The first reason was that the activity following the mini-lessons was not well-organized and effective. After the mini-lesson, the students had mechanical exercises, as described in the prior discussion. After conducting mini-lessons, working alone was insufficient to increase the pupils' knowledge of punctuation.

The second reason was that the writer's workshop technique was ineffective in improving students' writing skills when following the fundamental approach, which began with a mini-lesson, progressed to independent writing, and concluded with sharing time and conferencing. The sharing session was not effectively functional if conducted in the last stage. Given the situation, the procedure of implementing the workshop was adjusted and shifted to conduct the second cycle by placing the sharing time before writing so that participants could receive the benefits of sharing and discussion, which would aid them in writing.

In cycle 2, 24 of 28 students (86%) received an average or above-average score. It showed that the study's success conditions had been met. This accomplishment was further aided by the students' enthusiastic engagement in-class activities, as seen by the observation checklist findings. In cycle 1, 68.57 % of the class participated in the class activity. In cycle 2, however, the rate climbed to 83.93 %.

In cycle 2, in which the action of cycle 1 was revised and modified, the students seemed to enjoy the atmosphere of the workshop by having a group discussion before writing. The jigsaw was selected as the strategy for the sharing activity since it was a wonderfully effective means of learning the subject. More importantly, the jigsaw approach increased involvement and comprehension by assigning a significant role to each member of the group in the class exercise. Students got additional knowledge from their peers that were useful in helping them to understand more about the lesson. The workshop made the students hold accountable to their peers, they were active participants in the learning process, and the learning revolved around interaction with peers. Hence, the figure below shows the improvement of the students' writing scores after cycle 1 was modified and revised.
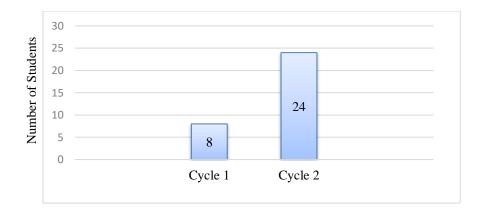
Figure 2: Students' Score Improvement in the Test

From Figure 2, it can be seen that the number of students attaining average or above-average scores increased. Different from cycle 1, where there were only 8 out of 28 students or 29% of students who got more than 61, which was the average score, there were 24 students or 86% of students who got the average or above-average score in cycle two.

Additionally, this is reinforced by the results of the questionnaire, where all students (100%) agreed that working in a group makes them understand more about how to apply correct punctuation in writing. 25 out of 28 students (89%) agreed that their mechanical writing skills improved after having the writer's workshop. Meanwhile, 24 students (86%) agreed that after learning about the mechanics in writing, they pay more attention to what they are writing. 23 students (82%) agreed that they had learned more about writing in English from this class than from other English classes they have taken in which grammar and mechanics are not big deals, and 25 students (90%) agreed that learning grammar and mechanics and having the writer's workshop in writing class are interesting.

As a result, it is possible to conclude that implementing the writer's workshop might boost students' active engagement in writing class, hence improving their grammatical and mechanical writing abilities. This result was reached after refining and changing cycle 1 to conduct cycle 2 as a mini-lesson, sharing, and autonomous writing format. Also, the revision and modification in the writer's workshop format implemented in cycle 2 were useful in making this strategy effective and advantageous both to make the students active and able to work with peers in improving and reinforcing their knowledge, so it could work successfully in helping the students use correct grammar and punctuation in writing.

Discussion

Based on the above findings, it is known that the implementation of the writer's workshop is useful in improving the students' grammatical and mechanical writing skills. It is reinforced

by the questionnaire results, which show that all students (100%) agreed that working in a group helps them comprehend more about how to use correct grammar and punctuation in writing and that 25 out of 28 students (89%) agreed that their grammatical and mechanical writing skills improved after attending the writer's workshop. 24 out of 28 students (88%) agreed that after learning about grammar and mechanics in writing, they pay more attention to what they are writing, 23 out of 28 students (82%) agreed that they feel that they have learned more about writing in English from this class than they have from other English classes they have taken in which grammar and mechanics are not big deals, and 25 out of 28 students (90%) agreed that learning grammar and mechanics and having the writer's workshop in writing class are interesting.

The approach for implementing the writer's workshop in the current study, which was done in two cycles, did not entirely adhere to Calkins' (2006) core framework of mini-lesson, individual writing, and sharing. It was also considerably different from the work of Christopher et al. (2000), who used fourth and fifth graders as subjects. The phases of the method were adjusted in this study. The participants were third-semester English Education students, such that they began with a mini-lesson, followed by sharing, and concluded with autonomous writing. The pupils were eager to participate in the mini-lesson. It was because they genuinely used their knowledge. They were allowed to use newly gained information in their writing. Furthermore, slower students benefited by having extra time to grow acquainted with new things by working in pairs to complete the exercise as a follow-up activity following the mini-lesson. Students gained confidence and independence as a result of sharing time. One positive outcome is that many students learned to be editors by applying what they learned in mini-lessons to their own and their classmates' work rather than waiting for the teacher to correct it after the fact. Furthermore, the sharing period was moved to the second session to foster student interaction. This practice, as cooperative learning, indirectly led them to feel accountable not just for learning what was taught but also for assisting colleagues in learning, establishing an atmosphere of accomplishment. Jigsaw, implemented in the sharing session, has encouraged contact among all students in the class, leading them to be active participants and regard each other as contributors to their common work. As a result, having the sharing activity was also useful. The students could directly apply the information they gained in the prior activities while undertaking the last step, which was writing.

Hence, the analysis of the students' final writing indicates that implementing the writer's workshop in this research might enhance the students' grammatical and mechanical writing abilities in terms of employing accurate structure and punctuation in writing. It was achieved

after considerable adjustment and modification of cycle 1 to cycle 2. The accomplishment might be determined by comparing the students' results in cycles 1 and 2. Furthermore, Figure 2 clearly shows the improvement in the students' writing scores between the first and second cycles. Finally, based on the findings of the observation checklists, field notes, and questionnaires, it is not only the students' achievement that indicates the success of the action but also the process of implementation that is effective and useful in improving students' achievement, particularly in using correct punctuation in writing.

The findings of the present study indicate that the writer's workshop's strengths lay in its methodical approach to generating a piece of writing, beginning with a mini-lesson, followed by autonomous writing, and concluding with sharing time. As a result, the students have more gratifying experiences since they can interact entirely with their peers and teachers. Writing is no longer a tedious and repetitive chore for them because of this exercise. Furthermore, most students believe that their ability to utilize accurate punctuation in writing has improved due to the teacher's explanations and training throughout the mini-lessons.

The writer's workshop, on the other hand, had significant restrictions in its execution. The sharing time did not function in this trial when placed at the end. As a result, it was completed on the second stage, which was for writing time. The students reaped several benefits from spending time together before writing to develop interpersonal and interactive abilities. Students were held accountable in front of their classmates.

Furthermore, it took quite a long time to arrange the seats for the various groups. As a result, certain activities had less time since this procedure took longer. Third, the time allocation was always a difficulty. The students needed more time, especially while conducting the exercises because some could not complete their duties in the allotted time. To summarize, while the writer's workshop has certain advantages, it also has some limits that the instructor should be aware of while using this technique.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicated that the writing workshop implementation effectively met the goal after revisions and modifications were made to conduct cycle 2. In cycle 2, the workshop structure comprised mini-lesson, sharing, and individual writing. It differed from the one in cycle 1 in that it followed the general framework of Calkins' (2006).

There were several positive aspects to implementing the writer's workshop in cycle 2 that could be noticed in the students' high accomplishment in participating in the mini-lesson,

executing the activities in pairs, holding group discussions, and sharing time. It was demonstrated by students' score improvement in cycle 2. Furthermore, the questionnaire findings show that the majority of students feel that working in groups allows them to comprehend the materials better. Given the findings, the following recommendations are made. First, English teachers are suggested to utilize a writer's workshop technique with the following pattern: mini-lesson, sharing, and independent writing, since this format has been shown in this study to be beneficial. Second, in light of the current study's limitations, it is recommended that future researchers do research on the writer's workshop approach with specific modifications or improvements to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in involving students in the learning process.

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