

# IMPROVING EFL STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS IN INTRODUCING THEMSELVES THROUGH THE SNAKES AND LADDERS GAME

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## Abstract

English language learning is very complex because students need to master four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Writing is a challenging skill for students in the first semester of seventh grade. It involves not only composing words into well-structured sentences but also understanding the function, meaning, and components of each word. Realizing this, the research was conducted with the aim of improving students' writing abilities in self-introduction through the game of snakes and ladders. Eventually, the students will produce self-introduction texts that will be uploaded to the Padlet application. The research participants consisted of 32 students from class VII H at SMP Negeri 36 Semarang. The method used was Classroom Action Research. Data collected for this research included observations, questionnaires, and tests. Two sets of pre-tests and post-tests were used to record improvements in students' writing skills. This research was conducted in two cycles, with each cycle consisting of two meetings involving planning, implementation, observation, and reflection stages. The research results showed that the application of the snakes and ladders game in improving students' writing skills provided good achievement in producing self-introduction texts. With an average pre-test score of 57.78, the average writing test score in the second cycle was 63.214, and the average post-test score was 80.681. The analysis of the questionnaire and observation also supported the idea that the snakes and ladders game can be applied not only in writing self-introduction texts but also in various other subjects and materials.

**Keywords – padlet; self-introduction; snakes and ladders game; writing skill**

## Introduction

Language serves as a means of communication, taking various forms such as spoken and written language. The primary objective of communication is to convey messages from the writer or speaker to the reader or listener. Given humans' social nature, they recognize the importance of interaction with others for survival. Consequently, people developed their unique ways of interacting, leading to the emergence of language.

English is recognized as one of the global languages, widely used by numerous countries worldwide. It encompasses four fundamental skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. According to Alexander LG (1975), these essential language skills are Understanding,

Speaking, Reading, and Writing, with the emphasis on speaking and writing being the most crucial aspects, as stated in his book.

In this section, the writer focuses on the skill of writing. The ability to write is a complex language skill that requires mastery of various aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. Brown (2004: 255) as cited in Rahmadhani and Kumala (2014) state that writing is a process of transforming students' knowledge into written form by generating ideas. Blanchard and Root (1998: 1) as cited in Mundriyah and Parmawati (2016) state that writing skills in a new language can be challenging and not always straightforward. Writing, as a productive skill, is closely linked to cognitive processes. Through writing, we

not only express our ideas but also enhance our writing abilities. Although both writing and speaking are productive skills, writing is a more intricate activity, as it necessitates comprehensive proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation.

In the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning in seventh-grade classes, it is often observed that students face challenges in developing their writing skills. Moreover, in several schools, it is found that English teachers merely explain and write materials on the whiteboard, which makes students feel challenged when it comes to writing due to various issues they encounter. They find it challenging to express ideas and develop ideas related to the topic. Additionally, they encounter difficulties in using adjectives and present tense. Organizing words in proper sentence structures also poses a problem. Consequently, the outcome of their writing is not as effective as desired. Furthermore, some students did not receive English lessons during their elementary school years due to regulations that removed English as a subject and replaced it with extracurricular activities.

In the teaching process, teachers play a vital role in facilitating students' learning through the appropriate choice of media and methods, in addition to mastering the teaching materials. They need to be creative in order to capture students' interest and motivation in learning. Therefore, it is essential to understand the characteristics of the students we are teaching so that we can determine suitable media to be used in the class. As stated by Juhana (2014) and referenced in Astuti, Fauziati, & Marmanto (2019), it is crucial for teachers of young learners to be familiar with and comprehend the characteristics of these students. This knowledge significantly impacts various

aspects of teaching, including teaching style, methods, learning materials, lesson planning, and the way teachers interact with young learners, ultimately leading to effective teaching.

One interesting approach that can help address this problem is using educational games in EFL. One effective teaching tool for practicing writing skills among students is the "snake and ladder" game. Previous studies on this approach have shown promising results in improving students' writing abilities. The game creates a positive learning environment and fosters enthusiasm among students to write and interact with their peers. By establishing a positive classroom atmosphere, it dispels the perception that English language learning is a serious and burdensome process, replacing it with enjoyment and pleasure. Additionally, students feel more valued, content, and secure while participating in this enjoyable learning process (Putra, 2012).

Therefore, this research will focus on the use of the Snakes and Ladders game as an innovative tool to improve EFL students' writing skills in self-introduction. Snakes and Ladders game will be given online. The aim of this study is to identify the impact of using this game on students' ability to write self-introductions.

From the previous illustration, the aim of this research is to implement the game snake and ladder game as an alternative strategy to improve the skills of writing self-introductions for junior high school students. In line with this objective, the research question is formulated as follows: "Is there any improvement in students' writing skill in introducing themselves through the snakes and ladders game?"

The benefits of this research are that implementing the game "Ular Tangga" (Snake and Ladder) will make English

language learning more engaging and enjoyable for students, thereby motivating and encouraging them to actively participate in the teaching and learning process. Additionally, with improved writing skills, students will feel more confident in expressing themselves in English, helping them to communicate more fluently and effectively.

**Methodology**

This study was conducted within the context of classroom-based action research, with the primary objective of evaluating and adjusting various elements to improve educational methodologies (Arikunto, 2013:24). This action research was carried out at seventh grade of SMP 36 Semarang

The procedure of this study is adapted from Stephen Kemmis that has developed a straightforward model depicting the cyclical nature of the standard action research process. Each cycle involves four steps: planning, action, observation, and reflection. In this study, the researcher conducted 2 cycles of research. The first cycle consisted of 2 meetings to address preliminary issues, while the second cycle comprised 2 meetings to address the problems identified in the first cycle. The researcher did not proceed to cycle 3 due to the time constraints given, and the author aimed to provide maximum learning in cycle 2. The data were taken through observation, questionnaire, and test. The tests were used to test the students on pretest, posttest 1 and posttest 2.

In this research, the primary data were obtained through observation, questionnaires, and tests. According to Sugiyono as cited in Indrianto and Supomo (2013), primary data is a data source that provides data directly to data collectors, while secondary data are collected beforehand and documented

data used as references. The observation was carried out to monitor students' activities during the teaching-learning process. It contained observation results about students' attendance, interest & motivation, students' activities during teaching learning process and the student' activities in focusing the attention to the teacher's explanation during the research conducted. The observation checklist would always be used during the research

In this study the questionnaire was used to collect data from students' interest, relevance, advantage, students' achievement, and sustainability during the teaching learning process. It was supported by Mills (2000:58) questionnaires allow the teacher researcher to collect large amounts of data in relatively short amount of time.

Table 1. Guidelines of the Questionnaire

Number of Question	Students' Opinion
1,2,3,4,5,6,7	About students' interest
8,9,10	About the relevance
11,12,13	About the advantage
14	About students' achievement
15	About sustainability

Source: Mills (2000: 58)

In this step the writer matches the mean of questionnaire result to the classifications.

Table 2. The Scoring Range of Questionnaire

Option	Score
A	1
B	2
C	3

Source: Mills (2000: 58)

Table 3. Classification of Graded Spources of Questionnaire

Range of Mean	0.00-1.00	1.01-2.00	2.01-3.00
Students' Interest	Low	Medium	High
The Relevance	Not Relevant	Relevant	Very Relevant
The advantage	Not Helpful	Helpful	Very Helpful
Students' Achievement	Low	Medium	High
Sustainability	Not Necessary	Necessary	Very Necessary

Source: Mills (2000: 58)

The purpose of the observation and questionnaire was to find suitable solutions to address the issues gathered by the researcher. Meanwhile, the test was used to assess students' ability in writing self-introduction texts through the snakes and ladders game. The test were used to test the students on pretest, postets 1 and postest 2. The test given considered of 20 items in the form of scambled sentences. After conducting the test, the researcher assessed the students' writing test papers and utilized the test to evaluate various aspects of their writing ability, including content, organization, vocabulary, language usage, and mechanics Jacobs, et al (1981: 31).

Table 4. Table of Scoring Writing Skill

Score	Level	Criteria
Content	30-27	<b>Excellent To Very Good:</b> Knowledge. Substantive. Thorough development of thesis. relevant to assigned topic
	26-22	<b>Good To Average:</b> some knowledge of subject. Adequate range. Limited development of thesis. Mostly relevant to topic, but lacks detail.
	21-17	<b>Fair To Poor:</b> limited knowledge of subject. Little substance. Inadequate

		development of topic
	16-13	<b>Very Poor:</b> does not show knowledge of subject. Non-substantive, non-pertinent, or not enough to evaluate
Organization	20-18	<b>Excellent To Very Good:</b> fluent expression. Ideas clearly stated/supported. Succinct. Well organized. Logical sequencing. Cohesive.
	17-14	<b>Good To Average:</b> somewhat choppy. Loosely organized but main ideas stand out. Limited support. Logical but incomplete sequencing.
	13-10	<b>Fair To Poor:</b> non-fluent. Ideas confused or disconnected. Lacks logical sequencing development
	9-7	<b>Very Poor:</b> does not communicate. No organization or not enough to evaluate

Vocabulary	20-18	<b>Excellent To Very Good:</b> sophisticated range. Effective word/idiom choice and usage. Word form mastery. Appropriate register.
	17-14	<b>Good To Average:</b> adequate range. Occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage but meaning not obscured.
	13-10	<b>Fair To Poor:</b> limited range. Frequent errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage. Meaning confused or obscured.
	9-7	<b>Very Poor:</b> essentially translation. Little knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms, word form. Or not enough to evaluate.
Language Use	25-22	<b>Excellent To Very Good:</b> effective complex constructions. Few errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function,

		articles, pronouns, prepositions.
	21-18	<b>Good To Average:</b> effective but simple constructions. Minor problems in complex constructions. Several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions but meaning seldom obscured
	17-11	<b>Fair To Poor:</b> major problems in simple/complex constructions. Frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions and/or fragments, run-ons, deletions. Meeting confused obscured
	10-5	<b>Very Poor:</b> virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules. Dominated by errors. Does not communicate. Or not enough to evaluate

Mechanism	5	<b>Excellent To Very Good:</b> demonstrates mastery of conventions. Few errors of spelling. Punctuation. Capitalization. Paragraphing
	4	<b>Good To Average:</b> occasional errors of spelling. Punctuation. Capitalization. Paragraphing. Meaning not obscured
	3	<b>Fair To Poor:</b> frequent errors of spelling. Punctuation. Capitalization. Paragraphing. Poor handwriting. Meaning confused or obscured
	2	<b>Very Poor:</b> no mastery of conventions

Source: Jacobs, et al (1981: 31)

The researcher assigned scores to each element of writing in the following manner:

Content : the lowest score is 13 and the highest score is 30

Organization : the lowest score is 7 and the highest score is 20

Vocabulary : the lowest score is 7 and the highest score is 20

Language Use : the lowest score is 5 and the highest score is 25

Mechanic : the lowest score is 2 and the highest score is 5

The scoring of the writing test was done by applying the scale scoring categories from an oral proficiency test developed by Arthur Hughes (2005: 104).

### **Finding and Discussion**

Results and discussion presented as much as 35-60% of the length of the article, written by a space 1, Times New Roman with font size 12 pt. The major part of the results contains the data analysis and hypothesis testing. Discussion is an important part of the overall content of a scientific article, load response research problem, interpretation of the findings, integration of findings from research into the existing body of knowledge, the preparation of a new theory or modifying existing theories.

This classroom action research was conducted in two cycles, and each cycle was carried out over two meetings. The research took place in July 2023. Each cycle was implemented through two meetings, each lasting 2 x 35 minutes. The implementation of this research was in English language learning, using the online learning game method, namely the snake and ladder game, with the VII H class, consisting of 32 female students. This classroom action research was conducted in four steps: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The learning actions conducted in each cycle were adjusted according to the Learning Plan Design. The focus of this research was to enhance the writing skills of self-introductions through the snake and ladder game.

The reason for conducting this research in two cycles was that during the first cycle, improvements were made, and those improvements were carried forward to the second cycle, where students had already shown improvement in their self-introduction writing skills. Hence, there was no need for further cycles.

### **Pre-Test**

In the pre-test, students were asked to produce a self-introduction text and the time allotment was thirty minutes. The given topic was "Self-Introduction" and they began writing the text.

The "Introducing oneself and others" text is part of the material covered in the first semester; therefore, students already possess the ability to produce this genre. This fact can be taken into consideration when determining the subsequent activities to be emphasized in this research. Before planning the classroom action research, I discussed with the English teacher. The discussion revealed that the students' abilities in reading, listening, and speaking were already quite good, but their writing skills still needed improvement to achieve satisfactory results. Based on the results of the pre-test with indicators: content, vocabulary, mechanisms, language usage, and organization, all students obtained an average score of 57.78, which is below the school's average of 75. The highest score achieved was 61.25, while the lowest score was 55. Considering the assessment results against the specified indicators, most students were unable to meet all of these indicators.

### **Cycle 1**

#### **Planning**

In this first meeting, the researcher has a plan to introduce a game of snakes and ladders which will be applied in the self-introduction text. The main objective of

this study is to improve students' ability to write self-introduction texts through snakes and ladders game compared to conventional methods. Firstly, I asked the students to discuss the pre-test they had just done. I requested them to engage in a discussion concerning the general structures, content, language features, mechanisms, and vocabulary they had used in their writing. Once they had completed their discussion, I provided a more detailed explanation about all aspects related to self-introduction. The purpose was to generate interest and capture their attention before implementing any further instructional strategies.

### **Acting**

This activity was conducted during the second meeting. According to the curriculum, the material "introducing oneself and others" was the second topic in the first semester. Students and the teacher then had a discussion about their difficulties in writing skills, especially in English.

After the discussion, the researcher implemented project-based learning as the teaching method. In this activity, the students received an explanation about the "introducing oneself and others" material, along with examples of self-introduction texts and a video. They were then instructed on how to write a self-introduction text, covering language elements used, the mechanism of writing a self-introduction text, organization, and vocabulary needed for it. The students were given an assignment by the teacher to write random sentences about self-introduction texts. The majority of the students successfully completed the task, demonstrating their understanding of the mechanisms, content, and grammar required to create self-introduction texts. The results were better than the previous meeting.

During this activity, the researcher explained how to play the snake and ladder game. The students seemed highly interested and enthusiastic about using it in their learning. After explaining how to use the snake and ladder game, the researcher described how they could create self-introduction texts after applying the game.

Next, the researcher implemented the snake and ladder game in a group setting. During the game, the students answered monologue questions, including multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank sentences, and random sentences. They wrote both the questions and answers they obtained on the Padlet application. After playing the snake and ladder game as a group, the students were asked to write their self-introduction texts. This activity made the writing process easier for the students.

Based on the results of the writing skills practice, most students already understood how to write self-introduction texts. At the end of the teaching and learning activity, the researcher advised the students to practice writing using the mind mapping method at home. Additionally, the researcher encouraged them to expand their vocabularies and explore their ideas, as it would prove beneficial when constructing a text.

### **Observing**

Based on the observation in the first cycle, Students' understanding of the material improves when they are given assignments. Second, their ability to determine vocabulary needs to be enhanced because it is crucial in writing skills. Third, their language proficiency in writing self-introductions needs further improvement. Furthermore, the snake and ladder game can be implemented in teaching and learning activities for writing skills. However, students need to



practice more to explore their thoughts and achieve better results in producing self-introduction texts.

### **Refelcting**

Reflecting was the fourth part of this study. It still focused on students' improvement in writing self-introduction text. The result of the observation in this cycle was used as guidelines to decide some activities for next cycle.

The students were asked to compose a self-introduction text while paying attention to the content, organization, vocabulary used, and the mechanism of constructing the text. Additionally, the researcher assigned the students homework related to composing sentences for self-introduction texts using the correct simple present tense.

### **Cycle 2**

#### **Planning**

This cycle was done in the third meeting of this classroom action research. In general, the procedure of teaching learning of this cycle was the same as previous meeting.

There must be an increase in students' abilities in compiling self-introduction texts by paying attention to the content, organization, vocabulary used, and the mechanism for compiling the text.

#### **Acting**

In the second cycle, the students played the snake and ladder game in groups of four to facilitate discussions among themselves. They were asked to answer monologue questions in the form of multiple-choice questions, random sentences, and fill-in-the-blank sentences. The students were required to write both the questions and answers on the Padlet application provided by the teacher.

After playing the snake and ladder game and answering the questions, the students were tasked with composing self-introduction texts. They could develop their ideas by referring to the questions and answers they obtained during the game. The students were expected to create self-introduction texts while considering the specified indicators, which included vocabulary, mechanisms, organization, language usage, and content.

The students' average score on the pre-test was 57.78. After two cycles and several treatments, the average student writing test result was 63.214. There was an increase in students' ability to produce self-introduction texts by comparing the results of the pre-test and the writing test in the second cycle.

#### **Reflecting**

The improved outcomes of the writing test during the second cycle indicate that the snake and ladder game was effective for writing self-introduction texts. Certain issues that students encountered were resolved through the treatments provided.

A post-test and questionnaire were administered at the conclusion of the study. The post-test results were compared with the pre-test and the writing test in the second cycle to assess the students' progress in writing self-introduction texts. Additionally, the analysis of the questionnaire provided supplementary information to support the primary data collected during the study.

#### **Post-test**

After completing the two cycles and several treatments, the students' writing abilities were once again assessed by giving them a post-test. In the previous meeting, the researcher reminded students to attend as there would be a post-test and questionnaire at the end of my research.

The researcher checked the students' attendance and began the post-test.

Before conducting the post-test, the researcher briefly reviewed the lessons that had been taught. The researcher asked the students once again if they had any difficulties in writing procedural texts, and assured them that any queries would be addressed. The post-test was similar to the pre-test, where the students were asked to create self-introduction texts while considering the specified indicators. The self-introduction texts for the post-test were written after playing the snake and ladder game.

The results of the students' self-introduction texts in the post-test stage showed a significant improvement, with all students achieving an average score of 80.681. The highest score obtained was 83.75, while the lowest score was 78.75. Based on these results, all students reached the passing grade (KKM).

### **Analysis of questionnaires**

In this activity, the researcher gave fifteen questions for the students. They were ordered to answer the questionnaires by crossing the choice a, b, or c in multiple choice questions. The technique in analyzing the first questionnaire were grading the items of questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured as follows: questions 1 to 7 focused on students' interests, questions 8 to 10 addressed the relevance of the topic, questions 11 to 13 explored the advantages, question 14 concerned students' achievements, and question 15 inquired about sustainability.

The second step was tabulating the data questionnaire, the researcher tabulated the questionnaire data in order to make the result of grading clearly readable. The table consisted of these columns: name, score per item, total scores, mean of each item and average of each indicator based

on the guidelines of the questionnaires. The third step was finding the mean. The next step was determining the graded scores. After that, the researcher matching the mean criterion. The last step was concluding the questionnaire result.

Based on the questionnaire results from students of class VII H at SMP N 36 Semarang, the students showed interest and enthusiasm when given the snake and ladder game for the "introducing oneself and others" material. Utilizing the snake and ladder game helped students in producing self-introduction texts. The game provided questions with random sentence formulas, fill-in-the-blank sentences, and multiple-choice questions that could be used to generate ideas for composing self-introduction texts. The students' achievement in producing self-introduction texts after using the snake and ladder game was very high.

### **Analysis of the Observation**

Based on the observation results conducted in class VII H of SMP N 36 Semarang, all students were present during the learning session. Judging from their interests, the majority of students have a kinesthetic learning style, as they are very active and tend to walk around the classroom. Additionally, the students' focus is often disrupted because they frequently get distracted by playing games on their smartphones while the teacher is delivering the lesson. When the teacher reprimands them, the students briefly regain focus, but soon after, they return to playing games and wandering around the class.

Most students also face difficulties in following English lessons. They perceive English as a complex subject and believe that writing is the most challenging aspect. As a result, they receive very low scores in writing assessments.

Furthermore, the students faced difficulties in English writing, particularly when it came to crafting self-introduction texts. Introducing oneself and others was a topic taught to seventh-grade students. One of the main issues they encountered while writing self-introductions was the struggle to find appropriate words, as they lacked sufficient vocabulary and felt confused about how to proceed. As a result, they lost interest and enjoyment in writing, viewing it as an uninteresting activity.

Based on the observation results during the second cycle, which took place in the first meeting, all students were present during the teaching and learning activity. All students displayed high interest and motivation when given the snake and ladder game, which was conducted in groups. The classroom environment was more conducive compared to the first meeting, and the students were more focused on participating in the learning activities. All students were disciplined in completing the given tasks, and they appeared actively engaged in identifying the difficulties they encountered. They even helped each other to solve the problems they encountered.

### Conclusions

Based on the previous explanation, I will summarize the results of the action research progress during the teaching of writing self-introduction texts using the snake and ladder game method. The students' writing test results improved from the pre-test to all subsequent tests. The average scores for the writing tests were as follows: pre-test (57.78), second cycle writing test (63.214), and post-test (80.81). It can be concluded that the snake and ladder game was suitable for maximizing their ability to explore ideas and use their imagination when producing self-introduction texts.

Based on the tabulation results of the questionnaire given to the students, it is evident that the implementation of the snake and ladder game in teaching written self-introduction texts was appropriately applied. It proved to be highly beneficial for students in generating related ideas and developing self-introduction sentences using appropriate vocabulary, language, mechanisms, and organization. The implementation of the online learning game using the snake and ladder game was something new for the students, which motivated them to utilize this method and encouraged them to learn more about written self-introduction texts.

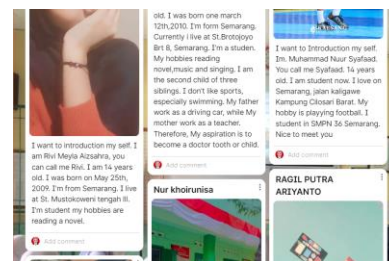


Figure 1. The results of the students' self-introduction text in the post-test

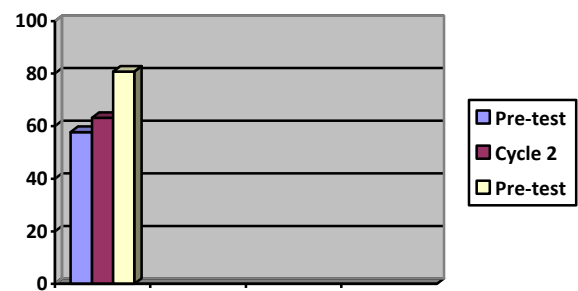


Figure 2. The results of the value of student self-introduction texts

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