



Improving Students' Skill in Writting Essay by Using Substitution Drill at The Eight Grades of SMP PAB 2 HELVETIA

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Abstrak

This study was done to help eighth-grade students at SMP PAB 2 Helvetia improve their writing skills by using substitution drills that focus on the simple present tense. The research started because many students had trouble making sentences with correct grammar and organizing their thoughts clearly when writing essays. The main purpose of this investigation was to determine whether the application of substitution drills could positively influence students' writing performance. The subjects of the research were 32 eighth-grade students in the 2025 academic year. Data were collected through writing assessments, observation sheets, and field notes. The results showed that students' writing skills improved a lot after using substitution drills. In the first cycle, 56.25% of students reached the minimum passing standard, and this figure rose to 84.37% in the second cycle. The observed improvement encompassed various components, including grammar accuracy, sentence organization, vocabulary mastery, and textual coherence in essay writing. In conclusion, using substitution drills in teaching the simple present tense helped improve students' ability to write essays. Because of this, it is recommended as a useful and effective way to help students get better at writing English compositions.

Keywords: substitution drills, essay writing, simple present tense, classroom action research

Abstract

Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk membantu siswa kelas delapan di SMP PAB 2 Helvetia meningkatkan keterampilan menulis mereka dengan menggunakan latihan substitusi yang berfokus pada simple present tense. Penelitian ini dimulai karena banyak siswa kesulitan menyusun kalimat dengan tata bahasa yang benar dan menyusun pikiran mereka dengan jelas saat menulis esai. Tujuan utama penelitian ini adalah untuk menentukan apakah penerapan latihan substitusi dapat memengaruhi kinerja menulis siswa secara positif. Subjek penelitian ini adalah 32 siswa kelas delapan pada tahun ajaran 2025. Data dikumpulkan melalui penilaian menulis, lembar observasi, dan catatan lapangan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keterampilan menulis siswa meningkat pesat setelah menggunakan latihan substitusi. Pada siklus pertama, 56,25% siswa mencapai standar kelulusan minimum, dan angka ini meningkat menjadi 84,37% pada siklus kedua. Peningkatan yang diamati mencakup berbagai komponen, termasuk akurasi tata bahasa, pengaturan kalimat, penguasaan kosakata, dan koherensi tekstual dalam penulisan esai. Kesimpulannya, penggunaan latihan substitusi dalam pengajaran simple present tense membantu meningkatkan kemampuan siswa dalam menulis esai. Oleh karena itu, cara ini direkomendasikan sebagai cara yang berguna dan efektif untuk membantu siswa menjadi lebih baik dalam menulis karangan bahasa Inggris.

Kata Kunci : latihan substitusi, penulisan esai, present tense sederhana, penelitian tindakan kelas

Introduction

Writing in English is often challenging for many students. They tend to face various obstacles when expressing their ideas in written form. Common difficulties include limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, misuse of dictionaries, spelling problems, and challenges in choosing appropriate topics. As stated by Husna (2017), many students show low enthusiasm toward writing, especially when it involves personal experiences, because writing requires multiple language skills like grammar, vocabulary, organization, spelling, and punctuation. Husna also emphasized that writing is an activity that integrates thought, language, and coordination.

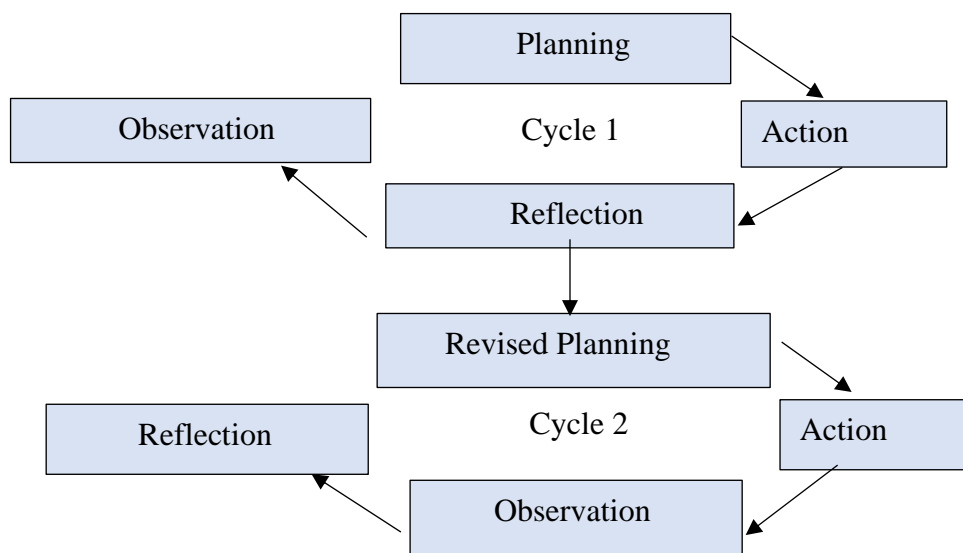
In classroom activities involving English language learning, the method was anticipated to improve students' understanding, not only provide appropriate learning materials but also apply effective teaching techniques that can foster students' motivation and engagement. Learning English does not only involve understanding the material but also depends on how the lessons are delivered to encourage active participation. One of the main purposes of English language teaching is to enable learners to express themselves clearly and correctly in both spoken and written contexts. Therefore, the selection of an effective teaching strategy is crucial for developing students'

English competence, with a particular focus on writing skills.

This study specifically focused on improving students' essay writing ability by using substitution drills in the simple present tense. It was chosen as the linguistic focus for developing students' writing competence. The research involved Eighth-grade students from SMP PAB 2 Helvetia during the 2024–2025 school year. Based on the researcher's previous teaching experience, it was observed that many students encountered difficulties in writing English texts. Considering these issues, the researcher conducted this study to enhance students' essay writing performance by the implementation of substitution drills emphasizing the simple present tense.

Method

The research applied the Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach. According to Arikunto (2010), classroom action research refers to a systematic inquiry conducted on a particular group of learners to enhance the quality of instruction and learning outcomes. In this study, the researcher implemented the model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart, which was adapted from Kurt Lewin's original framework.



Kemmis and Mc Tagart Model Classroom Action Research Cycle

This classroom action research took place in two cycles, and each cycle had four steps: planning, taking action, observing, and reflecting. Although the first cycle produced encouraging results, a second cycle was implemented to reinforce and validate the improvements achieved in the earlier phase. The study included thirty-two eighth-grade students from SMP PAB 2 Helvetia Medan, who took part in the research as the subjects.

Data collection refers to the procedures used by researchers to obtain information relevant to the study. According to Sugiyono (2010:224), data collection is one of the most crucial

Stages in research, as it determines the quality of the data gathered. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to collect the data. The non-numerical information came from watching classes, talking to people, and writing down observations, while the numerical data was taken from the students' test scores before and after the study.

Result

Before conducting the Classroom Action Research (CAR) activities, the researcher carried out several preliminary studies, namely:

1. Pre-test
2. Cycle 1
3. Post-test
4. Cycle 2

The preliminary study at SMP PAB II Helvetia Medan aimed to identify the existing conditions and difficulties experienced by This test includes questions that are based on text. These questions are given to students to check how well they can answer in English.

1. Pre-test

Table 1. Distribution of Writing Skill with substitution exercises in the Pre-Test

No.	Criteria	Total Student	Percentage	Information
1.	Complete	14	43,75%	Passed
2.	Incomplete	18	56,25%	Not Passed

Based on Table 4.2 above, the average student score was 52.72, the percentage of students who completed the test was 43.75%. Only 14 students passed the pre-test or evaluation session I. It can be concluded that students' skill to answer questions is still low.

2. Cycle-1

The collected data includes test results and evaluations of student responses. Second meeting (Friday, April 14 2025, 9:50-10:30 AM).

Table 2. Analysis of Student Ability in Multiple Choice Texts in Cycle I

No.	Category	Value Range	Frecuency	Percentage %	Information
1.	Very Good	80-100	4	12,5%	Passed
2.	Good	75-79	7	21,87%	Passed
3.	Sufficien	60-74	12	37,5%	Not Passed
4.	Poor	50-59	1	3,12%	Not Passed
5.	Very Poor	0-49	8	25%	Not Passed
Score			32	100%	

As presented in Table 4.4, among 32 students, 4 (12.5%) achieved the very good category, 7 (21.87%) were categorized as good, 12 (37.5%) as sufficient, 1 (3.12%) as poor, and 8 (25%) as very poor. Although these results show progress in students' performance on substitution drills, their ability to answer multiple-choice questions and comprehend the material was still considered insufficient. Since only 18 students (56.25%) completed the test, the researcher decided to continue to Cycle II to

further improve their performance through contextual teaching and learning.

3. Cycle 2

The researcher and teacher provided clues such as pictures, words, numbers, names, and so on, so that students could continue their answers according to the questions. There meeting (21 April, 2025 at 08.50 – 09.30).

Table 3 .Analysis of the Ability to Fill in Questions Through Essay Questions in Cycle 2

No.	Category	Value Range	Frecuency	Percentage %	Information
1.	Very Good	80-100	19	59,37%	Passed
2.	Good	75-79	4	12,5%	Passed
3.	Sufficien	60-74	4	12,5%	Not Passed
4.	Poor	50-59	2	6,25%	Not Passed
5.	Very Poor	0-49	3	9,37%	Not Passed
Score			32	100%	

As shown in Table 3, among the 32 students, 19 (59.37%) were in the very good category, 4 (12.5%) in the good category, 4 (12.5%) in the sufficient category, 2 (6.25%) in the less category, and 3 (9.37%) in the very less category. These findings demonstrate students' progress in Cycle II. They became more enthusiastic and engaged in completing the exercises, while the number of passive students decreased. Overall, students appeared more attentive and interested in the learning activities.

4. Post-test

The researcher will provide guidance to students regarding the same steps as in Cycles I and II, using the same methods. However, before administering the post-test, the researcher must provide an explanation. Fourth meeting (April 30, 2025, 8:50-9:30 AM).

Table 4. Analysis of the Ability to Fill in Questions Through Essay Questions in Post-Test

No.	Category	Value Range	Frecuency	Percentage %	Information
1.	Very Good	80-100	26	81,25%	Passed
2.	Good	75-79	1	3,12%	Passed
3.	Sufficien	60-74	3	9,37%	Not Passed
4.	Poor	50-59	1	3,12%	Not Passed
5.	Unsatisfactory	0-49	1	3,12%	Not Passed
Score			32	100%	

Based on Table 4 above, it can be seen that out of 32 students, 26 (81.25%) were categorized as very good, and 1 (3.12%) as good. Meanwhile, 3 students (9.37%) were in the sufficient category, 1 (3.12%) in the poor category, and another 1 (3.12%) in the unsatisfactory category. The findings

indicate Students showed greater enthusiasm and involvement when doing the exercises with the substitution method that the researcher provided. Although a few students remained less active, their number had significantly decreased compared to the previous cycle. In this final meeting, the class

atmosphere appeared more focused and students showed greater interest in learning. These results demonstrate an overall

improvement in students' writing skills and mastery of simple present tense sentences in essay writing.

Table 5. Student Learning Outcomes

No.	The Student Learning Outcome	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Information
1.	Pre-Test	Complete	14	43,75%	Passed
2.	Test Cycle I	Complete	23	71,87%	Passed
3.	Test Cycle II	Complete	27	84,37%	Passed
4.	Post-Tes	Complete	30	93,75%	Passed

Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that there was a significant improvement in students' achievement in mastering simple present tense sentences presented in essay form from the pre-test to Cycle I, Cycle II, and the post-test. The application of substitution drills, particularly those that focused on sentence formation accuracy, effectively facilitated students' progress and enhanced their overall writing performance.

The results showed that using the substitution method helped students a lot improvement in vocabulary mastery and writing skills. The scores from the pre-test, Cycle I, Cycle II, and post-test showed a steady rise, showing that the students made consistent improvements. In addition to test results, the researcher also observed the implementation process of the method throughout the learning activities. The teaching and learning sessions became more

interactive, enjoyable, and engaging, allowing students to develop a deeper understanding of sentence construction in the simple present tense and to write with greater accuracy.

Furthermore, interview data from both the English teacher and students supported these findings. They expressed positive responses, stating that the substitution drill technique was enjoyable, motivating, and beneficial in enhancing their English writing abilities. Observation results also confirmed students' active participation and gradual improvement in essay writing. Throughout the four sessions—comprising the pre-test, Cycle I, Cycle II, and post-test showed that the observer noticed students improving in their understanding of the simple present tense and in forming grammatically correct sentences.

Discussion

This study tried to help eighth-grade students at SMP PAB II Helvetia Medan better understand and use the simple present tense. The researchers used the substitution method to teach this grammar topic. To gather information, they gave four tests: one before the study started, one after the first cycle, one after the second cycle, and a final test at the end.

In Cycle I, many students still faced difficulties in answering questions and drawing conclusions due to their limited vocabulary and understanding. Their learning motivation was low, and the results were below expectations. However, after the researcher provided motivation and substitution-based multiple-choice exercises,

the students began to show more active participation.

activities successfully activated their prior knowledge and increased their engagement in the learning process. Consequently, their performance in Cycle II improved significantly compared to Cycle I. During the final meeting, the researcher provided only minimal guidance, as most students had already mastered the material.

Conclusion

The study showed that using the substitution drill method helped students better understand the simple present tense. This approach made students more involved, interested, and confident when using

In Cycle II, the students showed greater enthusiasm and readiness to learn. The implementation of simulations and warm-up

grammar, especially when writing. The big improvement in their test scores from before to after the study clearly shows that this teaching method works well for grammar lessons. So, it's suggested that English teachers try this technique as a new way to make grammar learning more interesting, active, and useful.

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