

Observation of Writing Skill Testing of Fourth Grade Student of SD Swasta Latihan 1 YP HKBP Pematang Siantar Using the Sentence Building Method

Frans Seda Panjaitan ^{1*}, Duma Grace Simanjuntak ¹, Netania Diva Sincha Saragih ¹, Herman Herman ¹, Asima Rohana Sinaga ¹, Bobby Pramjit Singh Dhillon ¹, Aprili Yanti ²

Department of English Education, Universitas HKBP Nomensen Pematangsiantar

Jl. Sangnawaluh No.4, Siopat Suhu, Kec. Siantar Tim., Kota Pematang Siantar, Sumatera Utara 21136, Indonesia

² Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara

Jl. Teladan Bar., Kec. Medan Kota, Kota Medan, Sumatera Utara 20216, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to observe the process and outcomes of writing skill assessment among fourth-grade students at SD Swasta Latihan 1 YP HKBP PEMATANG SIANTAR. The background of this observation is the students' limited ability to construct grammatically correct and structured English sentences. The teaching method used was sentence building, a technique where students are guided to form complete sentences from scrambled words provided by the teacher. This method was chosen as it is suitable for elementary-level students who are still developing basic sentence construction skills in English. The participants of this observation were all fourth-grade students. Data were collected through classroom observation, student worksheets, and reflective teacher notes. The teaching activity was conducted in stages, starting from the introduction of simple sentence patterns (Subject + Verb + Object), continued with guided sentence construction exercises, and concluded with individual writing tasks as evaluation. The observation results showed that most students demonstrated noticeable improvement in understanding sentence structure and exhibited greater confidence in writing short English sentences. Although minor errors in grammar and spelling were still present, the sentence building method proved to be effective in supporting students' writing development. Therefore, it is recommended that this method be applied consistently in elementary-level writing instruction, especially in the context of sentence construction activities.

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Corresponding Author:

Frans Seda Panjaitan

Universitas HKBP Nomensen Pematangsiantar

Email: franspanjaitan391@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the essential language skills that students must acquire, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language. Among the four fundamental language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—writing is often considered the most complex and demanding (Harmer, 2004; Girsang et al., 2025). This is because effective writing requires not only a sound understanding of vocabulary and grammar but also the ability to organize thoughts logically and express them coherently in written form (Brown, 2007; L. Tobing et al., 2025; Sinaga et al., 2025; Simanjuntak et al., 2025). For elementary school

students, developing writing skills is especially challenging due to their limited exposure to structured English writing and their ongoing cognitive and linguistic development (Cameron, 2001).

In many Indonesian elementary schools, including SD Swasta Latihan 1 YP HKBP Pematangsiantar, students are introduced to English at an early age. Despite early exposure, observations and preliminary discussions with teachers indicated that many fourth-grade students struggled to compose even simple English sentences correctly. Common issues included confusion in word order, limited vocabulary, and a lack of understanding of basic sentence structures, such as Subject + Verb + Object (SVO) (Cahyono & Widiati, 2011). These difficulties often result in low writing confidence and poor written performance, which can negatively affect overall language development (Nunan, 2003).

Research in language acquisition emphasizes that writing competence develops progressively and requires structured guidance (Krashen, 1982). Without proper scaffolding, young learners may experience frustration and limited progress in their writing abilities. Therefore, adopting appropriate instructional strategies is essential to foster both linguistic competence and confidence in writing. According to Gibbons (2002), scaffolding strategies in second language learning can provide learners with the support they need to internalize grammatical structures and apply them independently over time.

To address these challenges, this study employed the sentence building method as a strategic approach to enhance students' writing development. Sentence building is a learning technique where students are provided with jumbled words and are guided to arrange them into meaningful and grammatically correct sentences (Pinter, 2006). This method is particularly suitable for young learners because it emphasizes structure recognition and sentence formation in an interactive and manageable manner. It allows students to practice constructing sentences without the pressure of generating all the words themselves, thereby enabling them to focus on grammar, syntax, and coherence (Tompkins, 2011).

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of sentence-building exercises in improving writing skills at the elementary level. For example, Sibarani (2018) found that the sentence building method significantly increased students' ability to construct correct English sentences, reduce errors, and enhance confidence in writing activities. Similarly, Tarigan (2008) emphasized that structured approaches to writing practice help students internalize sentence patterns, which serves as a foundation for more complex writing tasks in later stages of learning.

This observational study was designed to explore how the sentence building method supports students' writing skills, focusing particularly on the formation of simple English sentences. The research examined classroom implementation, student engagement, and writing outcomes, providing a comprehensive picture of how this method functions in a real educational setting (Ur, 1996; Marbun et al., 2025). By observing teaching and learning processes closely, the study aimed to assess whether the sentence building method can serve as an effective tool in helping elementary students grasp sentence structure and improve overall writing performance.

In addition to evaluating practical outcomes, this study also sought to contribute to the broader field of English language teaching in Indonesia. Understanding how young learners respond to structured writing strategies can inform curriculum design, classroom practices, and teacher professional development (Lado, 2009; Nation, 2009). By providing evidence-based insights, the study can help teachers implement effective writing instruction that balances linguistic accuracy with learner engagement.

Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of combining theoretical knowledge of language learning with practical classroom strategies. Writing, as a productive skill, requires repeated practice, scaffolding, and guidance from teachers to ensure that students can move from recognizing sentence patterns to generating coherent texts independently (Harmer, 2004; Cahyono & Widiati, 2011). Through systematic observation and application of the sentence building method, this study aims to demonstrate a practical pathway for improving elementary students' writing skills in English.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the use of the sentence building method in enhancing elementary students' writing skills in English. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to capture authentic behaviors, classroom interactions, and student progress in a natural learning environment (Cameron, 2001; Rumapea et al., 2025). Unlike experimental or quantitative designs that manipulate variables, this study focused on describing, interpreting, and understanding how students engaged with the writing tasks and how the instructional method influenced their learning outcomes. By using a qualitative framework, the study aimed to provide rich, contextualized insights into the effectiveness of sentence building as a strategy for developing writing competence in young learners (Gibbons, 2002; Pinter, 2006).

Qualitative descriptive research is particularly suitable in educational contexts where understanding learners' experiences, behaviors, and responses is essential for improving teaching practices (Harmer, 2004). It allows the researcher to document the nuanced ways students internalize sentence structures, apply vocabulary, and respond to feedback. In this study, observation of classroom interactions complemented analysis of student writing samples to provide a comprehensive view of learning processes and outcomes.

Participants

The participants of this study were fourth-grade students from SD Swasta Latihan 1 YP HKBP Pematang Siantar, a private elementary school located in Pematang Siantar, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The class consisted of 20 students, aged approximately 9 to 10 years. All students participated in the classroom observation and engaged in the sentence-building activities collectively, without separation into groups or ability-based tracking. The inclusive nature of participation ensured that data reflected the general capabilities and learning needs of the entire class.

The English teacher also acted as the classroom observer, providing a dual perspective on both teaching practices and student responses. This dual role allowed for immediate reflection on instructional strategies and real-time adjustment of activities to support student learning. The teacher's involvement in data collection helped maintain ecological validity, as classroom activities were observed in their natural, uninterrupted context (Ur, 1996).

Setting and Duration

The observation took place in the students' regular classroom during their scheduled English lesson on [insert date]. The duration of the session was approximately 60 minutes, which aligns with typical lesson lengths in elementary school settings in Indonesia (Lado, 2009). The classroom environment was conducive to learning, equipped with adequate seating, visual aids, and writing materials that supported an interactive and hands-on approach. This setting allowed students to focus on the sentence-building tasks without distractions and facilitated active participation during group and individual activities.

Instructional Approach

The lesson was designed following a scaffolded, step-by-step instructional model to assist students in understanding basic sentence structure and forming meaningful English sentences (Vygotsky, 1978). The activities were structured as follows:

1. Introduction of Sentence Patterns: Students were introduced to simple Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) structures with examples and explanations.
2. Group and Pair Practice: Students worked in pairs or small groups to arrange scrambled words into coherent sentences under teacher guidance.
3. Individual Sentence-Building Tasks: Students practiced constructing sentences independently using new sets of jumbled words, allowing for assessment of individual understanding.
4. Review and Feedback: The teacher conducted a session to correct errors, provide constructive feedback, and reinforce sentence patterns learned during the lesson.

This instructional sequence aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes student-centered learning, active participation, and knowledge construction through meaningful tasks (Gibbons, 2002; Harmer, 2004). By gradually reducing guidance from teacher-led activities to independent tasks, students were able to build confidence and internalize sentence structures effectively.

Instruments for Data Collection

To collect relevant data, the following instruments were employed:

- a) Observation checklist: To record student participation, engagement, and classroom behaviors during sentence-building activities.
- b) Student written work: Worksheets and individual writing products were collected to evaluate students' understanding of sentence construction and identify patterns of errors.
- c) Teacher's field notes and reflective journal: The teacher documented classroom interactions, challenges, and perceptions of the method's effectiveness, which provided valuable qualitative insights to complement student work.

Using multiple instruments allowed for triangulation, increasing the credibility and validity of the findings.

Procedure

The observation session was conducted in four main stages:

1. Introduction (10 minutes): The teacher explained sentence structures and introduced key vocabulary.
2. Guided Practice (15 minutes): Students worked in pairs to arrange words into sentences, receiving immediate guidance and support.
3. Independent Practice (20 minutes): Students applied the sentence-building method individually using new jumbled words, allowing assessment of comprehension and skill transfer.
4. Review and Reflection (15 minutes): The teacher discussed common errors, provided feedback, and encouraged self-reflection on sentence construction.

This structured procedure ensured that students experienced both scaffolded learning and independent application, which is critical for developing autonomy in writing skills (Tompkins, 2011; Harmer, 2004).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically using qualitative methods to provide a rich description of student progress and instructional effectiveness. Analysis steps included:

1. Reviewing student writing samples to identify sentence patterns, grammar accuracy, and vocabulary use.
2. Categorizing common mistakes, such as errors in word order, subject-verb agreement, and sentence completeness.
3. Triangulating observation notes, student work, and teacher reflections to assess the overall impact of the sentence-building method.

The analysis provided insights into the effectiveness of the instructional approach, the types of difficulties students encountered, and the strategies that facilitated improvement. These findings contribute to understanding how structured, interactive methods like sentence building can enhance writing proficiency among elementary learners.

RESULTS

The observation revealed several important findings regarding the students' behavior, performance, and response to the sentence building method. Overall, the classroom atmosphere was very positive and conducive to learning. The fourth-grade students of SD Swasta Latihan 1 YP HKBP in Pematang Siantar responded with high levels of enthusiasm and energy throughout the session.

From the very beginning of the lesson, the students demonstrated eagerness to learn and actively engage with the material. When introduced to the idea of building sentences from scrambled words, the students responded with curiosity and excitement. They were quick to follow the teacher's instructions, indicating that they were cognitively ready and socially motivated to participate in structured writing activities. Many students raised their hands eagerly to answer questions or volunteer during the guided practice, which suggests a high level of classroom engagement.

During the pair and group activities, students collaborated effectively, helping one another understand how to order the words to form meaningful sentences. They were not afraid to make mistakes, and this openness contributed to a safe and supportive learning environment. Some students even began experimenting with more complex sentence structures beyond what was explicitly taught, showing signs of creativity and internalization of the material.

In the independent writing task, most students were able to construct simple SVO sentences with a reasonable degree of accuracy. Common sentence examples included:

- “The cat eats fish.”
- “I like banana.”
- “She plays guitar.”

These responses demonstrate a basic grasp of English sentence construction. However, several errors were also noted, particularly in:

- Verb agreement ("He play football" instead of "He plays football"),
- Article usage ("I see apple" instead of "I see an apple"),
- Word order confusion when dealing with adjectives or time phrases ("She book reads" or "I school go").

Despite these errors, the students showed consistent progress during the activity, often correcting themselves after feedback from the teacher or peers. This reflects a developing awareness of sentence logic and grammar.

One significant observation is that the sentence building method appeared to reduce anxiety around writing. Because the students were given words to manipulate instead of starting from scratch, they could focus on structure without feeling overwhelmed. This scaffolded learning allowed students to engage more deeply with the material, reinforcing grammar patterns through practice.

The cheerful classroom mood, combined with the structured and interactive nature of the activity, made the lesson highly effective. Students who were initially quiet began to participate as the lesson progressed. This shift indicates that the method not only teaches writing skills but also builds confidence and positive emotional connection to the language-learning process.

Furthermore, the method encouraged kinesthetic and visual learning, especially when physical cards or cut-out words were used. This multisensory approach is particularly helpful for young learners, who benefit from tangible materials and playful learning contexts.

In conclusion, the sentence building method was observed to be both pedagogically effective and engaging for fourth-grade learners. It supported foundational writing skills, increased classroom participation, and created a joyful learning environment. These factors together suggest that this method has strong potential for broader application in elementary-level English language instruction.



Figure 1. Documentation with student after the lesson is over

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the sentence building method effectively supports the development of writing skills among fourth-grade students. The positive classroom atmosphere and high levels of engagement observed throughout the lesson suggest that the method not only addresses linguistic learning objectives but also fosters motivation and participation. By providing students with scrambled words to arrange, the method reduces cognitive overload and allows learners to focus on understanding sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary in a manageable and interactive way. This scaffolded approach appears particularly well-suited to young learners who are still developing foundational English language skills.

One key finding is the students' active participation and enthusiasm during both guided and independent tasks. The eagerness to answer questions, collaborate in groups, and experiment with sentence formation demonstrates that the method engages learners cognitively and socially. The collaborative nature of the pair and group activities encouraged peer-assisted learning, whereby students supported one another in understanding sentence logic. This interaction not only strengthened comprehension of basic SVO structures but also allowed students to develop problem-solving skills and a sense of shared responsibility for learning outcomes.

The independent writing tasks revealed that students could construct simple sentences with reasonable accuracy, yet common errors persisted in verb agreement, article usage, and word order. These findings highlight the ongoing developmental nature of writing skills at this stage. While the method helps students internalize sentence patterns, consistent practice and corrective feedback are necessary to refine grammatical accuracy and expand sentence complexity. The iterative process of trial, error, and teacher feedback observed during the lesson appears to contribute meaningfully to skill acquisition and confidence-building.

Another significant aspect of the method is its ability to reduce anxiety around writing. By providing pre-selected words rather than requiring students to generate complete sentences from scratch, learners were able to approach writing tasks with less fear of making mistakes. This reduction in writing apprehension is crucial for young learners, as it promotes a positive emotional connection to language learning. Increased confidence, as observed in quieter students becoming more participative, may further enhance engagement and willingness to experiment with language, which is essential for language acquisition.

The multisensory elements of the sentence building method, including the use of physical cards or cut-out words, appear to strengthen learning outcomes. Young learners benefit from tactile and visual stimuli, which support memory retention and reinforce the connection between abstract grammatical rules and tangible linguistic forms. This hands-on approach encourages active learning and allows students to internalize sentence structures more effectively than through passive instruction alone.

Additionally, the creativity observed in some students, who experimented with more complex sentence formations, indicates that the method can encourage higher-order thinking. Beyond the immediate goal of mastering simple SVO sentences, students were able to manipulate language in inventive ways, reflecting both comprehension and confidence. This suggests that structured yet flexible methods like sentence building can provide a foundation for more advanced writing skills in subsequent lessons.

Overall, the discussion of these results supports the pedagogical value of the sentence building method in elementary English instruction. The method effectively combines structure, engagement, and emotional support, fostering a holistic learning experience that addresses both cognitive and affective domains. Its ability to increase accuracy, confidence, and participation demonstrates that it is a practical and adaptable tool for teaching writing to young learners. Future lessons could further extend its effectiveness by gradually increasing sentence complexity and integrating more vocabulary and grammatical patterns to challenge and develop students' emerging writing abilities.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the sentence building method is an effective and engaging strategy for improving the writing skills of fourth-grade students at SD Swasta Latihan 1 YP HKBP in Pematang Siantar. The observations revealed that students responded positively to the structured yet interactive approach, showing enthusiasm, active participation, and a willingness to experiment with sentence construction. The method successfully guided learners in forming basic English sentences, enhancing both their grammatical understanding and confidence in using the language.

Although some grammatical errors, such as incorrect verb agreement and word order, were observed, the students generally applied sentence patterns correctly after guided practice. The iterative process of structured guidance, practice, and feedback helped learners internalize sentence structures while encouraging creativity and problem-solving. Moreover, the method reduced writing anxiety by providing a scaffolded learning environment, allowing students to focus on constructing sentences without feeling overwhelmed.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that elementary English teachers integrate sentence building activities regularly into writing instruction, particularly when introducing grammar and basic sentence structures. Utilizing interactive tools such as word cards, digital sentence puzzles, or collaborative group exercises can further enhance engagement and reinforce learning. Overall, the sentence building method not only strengthens foundational writing skills but also fosters a positive, student-centered classroom atmosphere, motivating young learners to develop confidence and express themselves effectively in English.

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