

Boosting Student Engagement in English Writing through the Small Moments Strategy

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore how the Small Moments strategy can increase student involvement in the English language learning process, especially in writing skills. The research method used is a case study in a junior high school (SMP), where students are grouped into several groups and then each group applies the Small Moments strategy. Data was collected through observation, interviews, and analysis of students' writing before and after the intervention. The results showed that students who engaged in the Small Moments strategy showed significant increases in their motivation, creativity and writing abilities. Students are more active in sharing personal experiences and relating these experiences to the writing context, which in turn increases their sense of ownership of the work produced. These findings indicate that implementing the Small Moments strategy is not only effective in improving writing skills, but can also create a more inclusive and interesting learning environment. This research recommends implementing similar strategies in teaching English and other subjects to increase student engagement.

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Small Moment Strategy (SMS), Narrative Writing Instruction, Writing Proficiency.

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1. Introduction

English writing has been an important area of research as scholars look for better ways to teach it. Engagement strategies help students participate more actively in writing classes, boosting their confidence, motivation, and learning experience (Farizka & Cahyono, 2021; Yaumi et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2019; Hamuddin et al., 2020; Youngsun et al., 2024). One useful approach is the "Small Moments" writing strategy, which helps students reflect on their experiences and improve their understanding (Bleicher & Correia, 2011). Research also shows that reflective writing techniques can develop students' critical thinking and writing skills (Deroo, Pontier, & Tian, 2022; Ko et al., 2025). These findings highlight the need for engagement-focused strategies to make writing lessons more effective.

In recent years, researchers have studied teaching methods to improve how students write stories. One method, called the Small Moment Strategy (SMS), was developed by Calkins and Oxenhorn (2005) to help young students take a big experience and write a short, detailed story about a single important moment. This method works by helping students focus on specific, detailed moments in their writing rather than broad or generalized events. It encourages students to reflect deeply on their experiences by capturing vivid details, emotions, and sensory descriptions. This strategy is particularly useful in educational settings to develop students' narrative writing skills and reflective thinking. Other studies, like Septiana's (2021) work on group activities in classrooms, show that when students work together in small groups, they become more active, communicate better, and learn to respect different opinions. Similarly, Irawati (2019) found that using group discussions in religious education helps students understand lessons more deeply and improves their skills. However, most of these studies focus on very young children or on specific subjects like religion. There is still a gap in knowledge about how well the Small Moment Strategy works for teenagers in junior high school, especially in helping them stay motivated to write and in improving the depth and quality of their stories. These factors are especially important as teenagers grow and develop their thinking and emotional skills.

This study aims to fill these gaps by testing how the Small Moment Strategy is used in junior high school writing classes and what effects it has on students. The research has three main goals: First, it will look at how teachers can use SMS to help teenagers structure their stories in a clear and organized way. Second, it will measure how SMS improves students' writing skills, such as developing ideas, adding emotions, and making stories flow smoothly. Third, it will check whether using SMS increases students' confidence and motivation to write personal stories that matter to them. To do this,

the study uses a pre-experimental design, which means students take a writing test before learning SMS, then receive lessons using the strategy, and finally take another test afterward. The study involves 30 students from Class IX-B at SMP YAPIP Sungguminasa Gowa. The subject of the research were chosen because it is a great choice since it is the right size, at the right developmental stage, and perfect for showing how SMS can turn simple writing into meaningful stories. Their writing is scored based on five parts: the quality of their ideas, how well they organize their stories, their grammar, their word choices, and their punctuation. Building on Bleicher and Correia's (2011) idea that SMS helps students reflect on their experiences through writing, this research argues that SMS can change students' writing from simple, routine exercises into stories that truly express their thoughts and feelings. By combining clear writing rules with creative storytelling, SMS can bridge the gap between technical skill and authentic self-expression in adolescent writers.

2. Methodology

This study employed a pre-experimental design to examine the effects of the Small Moment Strategy (SMS) on students' writing skills. The design involved a single group of participants who completed a pre-test (writing assessment before the intervention), received the treatment (instruction using SMS), and then took a post-test (writing assessment after the intervention). This approach allowed the researcher to compare students' writing performance before and after learning the strategy.

2.1. Participants

The study was conducted at SMP YAPIP Sungguminasa Gowa, a junior high school in Indonesia. A total of **30 students** from Class IX-B participated in the research. This class was selected to represent the target age group (adolescents) and to ensure consistency in the learning environment.

2.2. Procedure

Data collection followed three sequential steps:

- a) **Pre-test:** Students wrote a narrative text without prior exposure to SMS. This established a baseline for their writing skills.
- b) **Treatment:** Over several sessions, students were taught to use SMS. They practiced breaking down broad experiences into focused, emotionally detailed stories, guided by examples and structured exercises.
- c) **Post-test:** Students wrote another narrative text using SMS, allowing the researcher to measure changes in their writing abilities.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data collected were **quantitative**, meaning they were numerical scores derived from assessing students' writing. Each student's pre-test and post-test texts were evaluated using five criteria:

- a) **Content:** Quality and clarity of ideas.
- b) **Organization:** Logical flow and structure of the story.
- c) **Language Use:** Correct application of grammar rules.
- d) **Vocabulary:** Appropriate and varied word choices.
- e) **Mechanics:** Accuracy of spelling, punctuation, and formatting.

Each component was scored separately, and the total score reflected overall writing proficiency. By comparing pre-test and post-test scores, the study identified improvements linked to the SMS intervention.

3. Result and Discussion

The findings of this research relate to the frequency and percentage of students' scores on the pre-test and post-test, where the pre-test is given to students before being given treatment. This aims to determine students' abilities in writing descriptive text. In writing descriptive text before teaching Small Moment teaching techniques. The findings reported in this chapter are based on data from 20 students. The pre-test and post-test results are calculated and collected through student scores based on five components in writing, they are content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. These data findings are explained into an average score formula and student scores are classified from very poor up to very good categories. The test formula is used to analyze the significance between pre-test and post-test data.

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Collecting Data through the Test

In collecting the data, the researcher gave the test to the students for twice. The first test called pre-test. The pre-test was given before giving the treatment with the aim to know the prior ability of the students' writing. After giving the pre-test, the researcher gave treatment to the students to help them improving their writing by using Small Moment teaching technique. The second test was post-test. The post-test was given after giving the treatment with the aim to know the students' achievement after giving the treatment by using Small Moment teaching technique. The result of pre-test and post-test can be seen below:

a. The Raw Score of Five Components of Writing in Pre-Test

Table 1. Score classification of pre-test of students' class BI 4.2 frequency and rate percentage

Classification	Score	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Good	100-88	0	0
Good	85-76	3	15
Average	75-64	13	65
Poor	63-45	4	20
Very Poor	44-34	0	0

Based on the data shown in the table 1, it showed that before treatment was given, none student classified as both very poor and very good score (0%), 4 students got poor score (20%), 13 students procured average score (65%) and there were 3 students obtained good score (15%). The students' score of pre-test in five components, there were content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanic. The analysis of content component was presented in details below.

1) Content

Content is an important role to have a good writing. In content, all the ideas should be well unified and completed. The following table shows the frequency and rate percentage of the students' scores in the content component.

The result of the pre-test of content, there were no students' respondents whose skill that could be categorized as good and very good in their writing content. There were 15 students (75%) who classified as poor and there were 5 students (25%) in the very poor category. From the result above, it could be seen and concluded that the majority of the students' writing skill in the content component was in the very poor category the students still felt difficult to write and express their ideas and seemed no ideas on how to begin their writing. It became the major problem of the students in pre-test without giving them some treatments and explanations before start writing. As the result, the content of students' writing were still very poor. Some of the students could not express their ideas in the pre-test.

Table 2. Classification, score, frequency, percentage of the students' writing in this case

Classification	Score	Frequency	Percentage
Very Good	27-30	0	0
Good	22-26	0	0
Poor	17-21	15	75
Very Poor	13-16	5	25
TOTAL		20	100

2) Organization

Organization materials in writing involved five processes. They are coherences, order of importance, general to specific, specific chronological order and spatial pattern.

The table 3 below displayed students' writing in the pre-test on component of organization. There were 5 students (25%) who categorized as very good score, there were 12 students (60%) got good score, there were 3 students (15%)

who classified as poor score, and none of students who put into very poor score (0%). Based on the data below, it could be seen and concluded that most students in two levels, they were in good and very good category.

Table 3. Classification, score, frequency, percentage of the students' writing in this case Organization pre-test result

Classification	Score	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Good	18-20	5	25
Good	14-17	12	60
Poor	10-13	3	15
Very Poor	7-9	0	0
TOTAL		20	100

3) Vocabulary

Vocabulary is one of the language aspects dealing with the process of writing study. The effective use of the words will always give the result of as good writing both specific and technical writing.

Based on the data shown in the table 4, in the pre-test, there were 2 students (10%) who could be categorized as very good score, also 17 students (85%) got good score and there was 1 student (5%) classified as poor score, while in very poor score none of students. From the result below, it can be concluded that majority of the students were lack of vocabulary mastery especially in very good category in the pre-test. They did not have much vocabulary in English. It might be the reason why their writing based on Indonesian grammar.

Table 4. Classification, score, frequency, percentage of the students' writing in this vocabulary pre-test result

Classification	Score	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Good	18-20	2	10
Good	14-17	17	85
Poor	10-13	1	5
Very Poor	7-9	0	0
TOTAL		20	100

4) Language in use

Language use in writing involves in connected to language and point of Grammar such as subject, verb and agreement.

The table 5 below showed students' writing on component of language use. There was none student (0%) students who classified as very good and very poor score, there were 3 students (15%) who categorized as good score, and there were 17 students (85%) got poor score. The table below showed that most students in one level. There was the poor level, they were in 17 frequencies. Based on the data above, it can be seen and concluded that more than half students were poor on their writing ability in pre-test based on component of language use. They did many mistakes on sentences structure and did not care of the English Grammar.

Table 5. Classification, score, frequency, percentage of the students' writing in this language in use pre-test result

Classification	Score	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Good	22-25	0	0
Good	18-21	3	15
Poor	11-17	17	85
Very Poor	5-10	0	0

TOTAL	20	100
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5) Mechanic

The use of mechanic is due to capitalization, punctuation, and spelling appropriately is very important since it leads reader to understand and recognize immediately what the writer means to express definitely. The use favorable mechanics in writing will make readers easy to understand in conveying ideas and other message in writing.

The table 3.6 below described that the students' writing in this mechanic pre-test result, there were none students (0%) got very good and good score, there were 7 students (35%) classified as poor score, and there were 13 students (65%) got very poor score. The table below showed that most students were categorized in one level. They were in very poor level with 13 frequencies. It can be seen and concluded that more than half students were poor on their writing ability in pre-test based on component of mechanic. They did many mistakes on sentences structure and did not care of the English Grammar.

Table 6. Classification, score, frequency, percentage of the students' writing in this mechanic pre-test result

Classification	Score	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Good	5	0	0
Good	4	0	0
Poor	3	7	35
Very Good	2	13	65
TOTAL		20	100

Table 7. The Raw Data of Students' Pre-test

NO.	Name of Students	Pre-test Score					
		Cont.	Organiz	Voc	L.Use	Mech	Final
Total Score		367	320	310	325	47	1.3687
Mean Score		18.3	16.0	15.5	16.2	2.3	68.4

Based on the raw data above, the students' score on five components in pre-test result, the researcher concluded that from 20 students of class IX-B was in low score level. It can be proved that there was detail classification of content pre-test result, that there were no students' respondents whose skill that could be categorized as good and very good in their writing' content. There were 15 students (75%) who classified as poor and there were 5 students (25%) in the very poor category. From the result above, it could be seen and concluded that the majority of the students' writing skill in the content component was in the very poor category the students still felt difficult to write and express their ideas and seemed no ideas on how to begin their writing.

The students' writing in pre-test on component of organization, there were 5 students (25%) who categorized as very good score, there were 12 students (60%) got good score, there were 3 students (15%) who classified as poor score, and none of students who put into very poor score (0%). Based on the data below, it could be seen and concluded that most students in two levels, they were in good and very good category.

The result of the students' writing in this vocabulary component in pre-test, there were 2 students (10%) who could be categorized as very good score, also 17 students (85%) got good score and there was 1 student (5%) classified as poor score, while in very poor score none of students.

The table above showed that students' writing in this language in use pre-test result, there was none student (0%) students who classified as very good and very poor score, there were 3 students (15%) who categorized as good score, and there were 17 students (85%) got poor score. Most of students in one level, there was the poor level, they were in 17 frequencies.

The result of the students' writing in this mechanic pre-test showed that there were none students (0%) got very good and good score, there were 7 students (35%) classified as poor score, and there were 13 students (65%) got very

poor score. The table below showed that most students were categorized in one level. They were in very poor level with 13 frequencies.

Based on the raw data, students' scores in five components above, the researcher presented. The researcher concluded that in the following chart below from 20 students of class IX-B was in low score level.

3.2.1 Comparing between the mean score of the students' pre-test and post-test in five components

Table 8 below showed that Comparing between the mean score of pre-tests was 68.4, and the mean score of the post-test was 77.7.

Table 8. Comparing the mean score of the students' Pre-test and Post- test

Components	Mean Score of Pre-Test	Mean Score of Post-Test
Content	18.3	20.9
Organization	16.0	17.5
Vocabulary	15.5	18.3
Language Use	16.2	18.4
Mechanic	2.3	2.7
Final Score	68.4	77.7

Based on the explanation above, it could be concluded that the ability of the students' writing in post-test was higher than the ability of the students' writing on pre-test. Based on the result of the t-test, the researcher found that there was significant difference between the result of pre-test after comparing it.

The researcher concluded that the mean score of the students' writing based on the result on post-test 77.7 was greater than the mean score of pre-test 68.4. It means that there was an improvement between the students' writing descriptive text by using Small Moment teaching technique.

The content of the mean score of the students' writing on post-test 20.9, on the content component was higher than the mean score of pre-test 18.3. It showed that in content there was an improvement between the students' writing descriptive text by using Small Moment teaching technique.

The organization of mean score of the students' writing on post-test 17.5, on the organization component was higher than the mean score of pre-test 16.0, it showed that in organization there was an improvement between the students' writing descriptive text by using Small Moment teaching technique.

The vocabulary of mean score of the students' writing on post-test 18.3 based on the vocabulary component was higher than the mean score of pre-test 15.5. It showed that in vocabulary there was an improvement between the students' writing descriptive text by using Small Moment teaching technique.

The students score in language in use criteria of post-test 18.4 it was categorized as good because dominated by errors in grammar and the students' score classification of pre-test in language in use criteria was 16.2 it was categorized as poor score because fair many errors in tense, number, agreement, articles, pronouns, and preposition. The students' mean score in post-test greater than the mean score of pre-test especially in language in use component in writing descriptive text.

From the data analysis in mechanic criteria, the students score of pre-test 2.3, it was categorized as poor score because of the handwriting was eligible. The students score in mechanic criteria of post-test 2.7 it was categorized as poor score because some errors of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and paragraphing but meaning confused or obscured. Based on the previous explanation the researcher concluded that the students' score of post-test was greater than mean score of pre-test before doing treatment using Small Moment teaching technique and that the students' mean score of post-test was higher than mean score of pre-test concerning to score classification of five components namely, content, organization, vocabulary, language in use, and mechanic.

Based on the data shown on the table 3.9 below, the t-table was between the result of the students' scores in pre-test and post- test 2.093 and the t-test was 12.22. Referring to the data shown, it also could be inferred that there was significance difference test in students' pre-test and post-test before and after teaching and learning through Small Moment

teaching technique. The table of t-test of the students' writing ability after having treatment is presented in the following table.

Table 9. Students' writing ability achievement

Variable	T-test value	T-table
X2-X2	12.22	2.093

3.2.2 Hypothesis Testing

For level of significance $p = 0.05$ and $df = n - 1$ thus the value of t-table found by using interpolation system. The formula used and procedure in finding out the value of (df) 19 was presented as follows: To find out degree of freedom (df) the researcher used the following formula:

$$Df = N - 1 \text{ where } (N = 20)$$

$$Df = 20 - 1$$

$$Df = n - 1$$

$$Df = 19$$

Compared with t-test value, it can conclude that t-test value was 12.22 higher than the value of t-table 2.093. In other words, it can be said that $12.22 > 2.093$. It means that there were significant of the students achievement after giving the treatment through Small Moment teaching technique. Thus, it meant the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted.

From the analysis above, the researcher concluded that there was significance different between the score got by the students in pre-test and post-test in writing through Small Moment teaching technique. Teaching writing by using Small Moment teaching technique improves the students' writing skill.

3.2 Analysis

The discussion deals with the interpretation of findings delivered from data analysis. The description of data through the test has been explained in the previous section. Here, the researcher discussed the result of the Small Moment teaching technique in students' writing skill at students' Junior High School students' of SMP Yapip Sungguminasa-Gowa in relation to the research question. Relating to the description above writing is very important subject because in writing the students must share the idea from their brain, it is not easy to translate concept in their brain to be written language, and they must also be clever to choose and to combine the vocabulary to create something that is meaningful. The students also must pay attention to the grammar, so it is normal if the students think that writing is a difficult subject because they must pay attention to many things (idea, concept, vocabulary, and grammar).

Based on the result in this chapter, the researcher saw that through Small Moment teaching technique on five components of writing (content, organization, vocabulary, language in use and mechanic) showed where in the content component in the pre-test before the implementation of Small Moment teaching technique, the students' mean score was categorized into poor level. While, in the content component in the post-test after the application of Small Moment teaching technique, only a few students got mean score categorized into poor level. It means that, after implementing the treatment by using Small Moment teaching technique, the students' mean score was improved especially in content.

In organization component in the pre-test before the application of Small Moment teaching technique, the students' mean score was categorized into poor level. While, in the organization component in the post-test after the application of Admit and Exit Slips teaching technique, the students' mean score was categorized into very good level. It means that, after implementing the treatment by using Small Moment teaching technique, the students' mean score was improved especially in organization component.

In the vocabulary component, the students mean score was categorized into poor level. While after the implementation of Small Moment teaching technique, the students' mean score was categorized into good level. It means that, after implementing the treatment by using Small Moment teaching technique the students' mean score was improved.

Next, in the language in use component, the students mean score was categorized into poor level. While, in the language in use component in the post-test after giving the treatment by using Small Moment teaching technique, the

students' mean score was categorized into good level. It means that, after giving the treatment by using Small Moment teaching technique, the students' mean score was improved especially in language in use.

Meanwhile In the mechanic component, the students mean score was categorized into very poor level. While, in the post-test after applying the Small Moment teaching technique, the students' mean score was categorized into poor level. It means that, after applying the treatment by using Small Moment teaching technique, the students' mean score was improved especially in mechanic.

The researcher concluded that, Small Moment teaching technique is one of the good technique in teaching writing to write what the students have known before and they may write with their own language. The Application of Small Moment teaching technique in improving the students' writing skill. This was proved by the t-test value was higher than t-table.

This strategy was applied to teach English in order to improve the writing skills of the students of the Junior High School of SMP Yapip Sungguminasa-Gowa in academic year 2024/2025. This strategy was able to encourage the students written become better than before. The significant differences was shown by the total scores of the students writing skills under the five components of writing where the students post-test total scores was better than the pre-test.

Based on the description in this discussion, we can say if Small Moment teaching technique is effective in teaching writing ability which writing as ways of learning focus of our mind. It can be seen on the appendix A. if the students' pre-test (X_1), post-test (X_2), gain/ different between matched pair (D_1), and the square gain (D_2) was improved.

To find out the observation before giving the treatment, these difficulties are shown by the students of Junior High School students'of SMP Yapip Sungguminasa-Gowa. The students of this campus, especially the students in the class of IX-B indicated that they have experienced difficulties in learning English writing. Some of the students did not study English in their previous school. Either, many researchers have done to help the teachers of English in teaching writing by offering the methods or strategies and one of them is Small Moment teaching technique. After giving the treatment, the students' organization and vocabulary in writing was improved. Besides that, we can see the result of the student's pre-test and post-test, the value of t-test and the value of t-table. This means that there was a significant difference between the result of the students score in pre-test and the result of the student's in post-test. It can be seen by proved that the mean score of the student's post-test was higher than the result of the student's pre-test. Another proved also shows the improvement of the students' writing ability was proved by the value of the t-test was higher than the value of the t-table. Thus, it meant the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted.

In this study, the researcher focused on the integration of a specific technique. The Small Moment teaching strategy helps the students focus on the development of paraphrasing and summarization skill of freshman Honors' students. In this action research study highlighted the importance of implementing and equipping students with specific writing strategies to interpret and make meaning from new and unfamiliar texts. When students are taught a specific strategy to interpret new text through the use of paraphrasing and summarization, the students' skill levels are increased, as well as their level of understanding of the text. The results of the study suggest that the Small Moment strategy was an effective method to help students rehearse their skills during controlled amounts of class time.

In other words, Small Moment teaching technique was successful not only because this technique itself but also because the teacher's ability to present well-matched material with the program, the various teaching and the class condition and situation as well as the students' eagerness to support all other factors. To create their own written and the researcher also showed other important points such as the rules of writing help the students learn to write well it could not be applied in common because it has the standard rule and the teacher's goal to make the students not feel bored easily to write. Finally, the researcher concluded that Small Moment teaching technique improves the students writing ability in Junior High School of SMP Yapip Sungguminasa-Gowa in class IX-B.

4. Conclusion

The result of data analysis confirms an emerging issue regarding the positive effect of intervention using Small Moment teaching technique. This can be warranted that productive skills such as writing needs special attention of professional teachers to inculcate values in order to make substantial changes in both knowledge and skills of writing. In other words, the application of Small Moment Strategy helped the students in generating ideas, organizing texts and improving their writing besides inducing students' motivation.

The current teaching innovation appears to generate total engagement of students in shaping ideas as well as highlighting concepts in order to produce piece of writing relevant to their level at secondary schools. This technique will

in turn be able to engage the students' attention and interest during the teaching and learning process of writing. In short of Small Moment teaching technique provides vitality of students potential in resolving their problem of writing that has been neglected by many teachers ever since The students became more confident to write and active in the classroom activities. Since the students were motivated and the writing class ran well, the students' writing skills were also improved.

Based on the conclusions above, the application of Small Moment strategy was successful to improve the writing ability of the Junior High School of SMP Yapip Sungguminasa-Gowa in IX-B Sungguminasa-Gowa. Small Moment teaching technique also helps the students improve their skill in organizing the text because it helped them remembering the elements in describe text. Small Moment teaching technique also made the students to focus on the lesson. Thus, it meant the null hypothesis (H0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H1) was accepted.

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