

IMPROVING THE EIGHTH GRADERS' SKILL IN WRITING PERSONAL ESSAY THROUGH STORY-BASED APPROACH

Sasti Nanda Jayanti*, Siti Muniroh

PPG, Universitas Negeri Malang, Semarang Street No. 5 Malang, Indonesia

*Corresponding author, email: siti.muniroh.fs@um.ac.id

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Abstract

The problem faced is that most of the students were demotivated in writing English, and they used to write limited sentences because they were struggling in both grammar and looking for ideas. Story-based approach is a hilarious strategy by using many stories that can be applied to build the students' grammatical mastery as well as in improving their writing skill for personal essay in the form of a recount text. This current study aims to solve the problems and explain how the story-based approach applied. The research design employed is a classroom action research. The participants of this study are 32 students of 8B in SMPN 18 Malang. The data were collected from preliminary study, writing test, observation, interview, and field notes. The result indicated that the students' writing skill of personal essays improves through this strategy. It was proven from the uplift of the mean score from preliminary study (47.00) to writing test (77.00). The writing test score has achieved the target score (70.00). A story-based approach contributes the students' writing skill as well as grammatical mastery learning strategy, and it can also be applied for young learners and college students.

1. Introduction

Writing is one of four English skills that is considered to be an essential part and should be trained in learning a language. Writing is also called a productive skill, as the product is real. Writing is both physical and mental action (Nunan, 2003). However, writing is categorized as the most difficult skill for second language and foreign language learners (Ardyan & Saun, 2014).

Writing needs some processes of thinking, and it is about the writer's effort. Someone who is writing needs preparation such as ideas, writing tools, and physical action. When something is written down and delivered in its final form to its intended audience, the writer abdicates a certain power: the power to amend, to clarify, and to withdraw (Brown, 2001). The goal of writing is when someone could perform the written text and it consists of correct grammatical sentences, and the reader could catch what the writer means. On the other word, it is called understandable among the grammatical features, vocabulary used, and the context of its written text.

Oshima and Hogue (2007) stated that there are four steps in the process of writing: 1) pre-writing, 2) organizing, 3) writing, and 4) publishing. Pre-writing step is considered to be an essential part because in this step, someone looks for an idea that will be written. In addition, someone usually reads some references to enrich ideas and information. In organizing, someone who is going to write arranges the ideas into the main idea before it is developed. It could be in the form of main points of each paragraph that is about to be written. For the writing section, someone develops the ideas and composes the content of writing. This is the most crucial part, as the writer should pay much more attention to its grammatical features, the vocabulary used, and the way the idea develops in order to be coherent ideas. The goal of writing is that the written text of someone's idea can be published in a small or huge area, and other people can easily access or read it. As a result, the purpose and the aim of the writer can be delivered to the readers. The best way to test people's writing ability is to get them to write (Marbun & Siahaan, 2019).

Discussing the important roles of writing and grammar, middle school students are obliged to be introduced to practice writing and learning grammar as a guidance. One of the simple things that

can be used as a reference to practice writing for the beginner is a personal essay. Brewer (2021) stated that a personal essay is a piece of nonfiction writing which shares an entertaining, interesting, memorable, or humorous story for readers that is drawn from the writer's personal experiences in the past. Recount text is one of the examples of personal essays. Learning through a story is considered interesting, as each person has their own story, and it might be different from other person's story.

Story is the starting-point for the different language and learning activities, and it is a valid alternative to introduce and train language skills. Stories contain everyday language that we can find in the traditional syllabuses for learners. As a result, the story can enrich their vocabulary, for learning patterns or grammar. In addition, telling a story can reduce stress and liven up the atmosphere of the classroom. Story-based approach is closely related to grammar learning strategy. In writing a personal essay, especially a recount text, grasping simple past tense is crucial. Story-based approach by Adair Hauck and Donato has four phases namely presentation, attention, co-construction, and extension (Yunita, Mayuni, & Emzir, 2018). The stories are presented to the audience. Afterward, the audience pay attention to the instruction. For instance, the educator requires the audience to focus on the simple past tense form from the story. Then, the audience is supposed to construct and conclude the pattern of the tenses being discussed. After grasping the pattern, the audience can extend their understanding by composing some sentences using tenses to be a text. A recount text is a text telling about an experience which happened in the past. It can entertain the readers and learn a moral value from the story. The story has an expression of attitude and feeling toward the events (Knapp, 2005).

On this occasion, the researcher as well as the teacher combines the aspect of writing, grammar, and story-based approach in the learning process in order to engage an enjoyable learning through a story in the past from someone's experience. Students can both learn the grammar and tell their own story or other person's story, as students undoubtedly tell and listen to a story. Then, the students can try writing a story or the past experience using the tenses that have been discussed as an implementation. Storytelling does not always use a story in the process, but sometimes using someone's past experience (Rianto, Atika, & Safitri, 2021).

Regarding the interview section conducted with the English teacher of SMPN 18 Malang, the problem addressed in this study is that the students were demotivated to write using English. It can be shown when the students were required to write in English, they used to have limited sentences. They were struggling in both grammatical mastery and looking for ideas to be written. For eighth grade students, there are some chapters discussing grammar, especially in tenses. When the teacher delivers the material or the concept of it, some of the students are still confused about the function, the use, and the pattern of it, and they have a lack of understanding in distinguishing the function, the use, and the pattern among some tenses. As a result, the teacher tends to explain the grammar material deductively. That is why the researcher would like to apply a story-based approach to learn grammar and writing skills.

Febriyanto, Naufal, & Budiarty (2021) stated that on the curriculum 2013, the competence of attitude assessment both the spiritual (KI 1) and social (KI 2) are not taught in the teaching and learning process, but it is based on the students' core and closing activities. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2017), the portion of character that should be implemented for middle school students is 60 percent. Therefore, the teachers should also support this portion and integrate it during the lesson.

Therefore, to solve the problems that the students have, there are some supports for theories and the previous studies. Yunita, Mayuni, & Emzir (2018) stated that the use of ISGL (Integrated Story-Based Grammar Learning) model enhanced and improved the students' grammatical mastery rather than by using a conventional or deductive technique at the English Education Study Program at the University of Bengkulu. It is also revealed that the implementation of the model made the learning process more enjoyable and interesting, and the students were motivated to learn grammar outside the class. Another study conducted by Yundayani, Emzir, & Rafli (2017), they conducted survey research and found out the needs in learning English grammar for college students in Bengkulu University. The need analysis result shows that the story-based approach is in the first position among the choices. The students' preference to be taught by using English is influenced by

the fact that they are accustomed to being taught by using stories in their high school. The next study was conducted by Rianto, Artika, & Safitri (2021) which shows that there was a significant difference between students who are taught by using the storytelling of the prophet Yusuf based on Quran verses and the students who are not taught by using storytelling. It indicated that using the storytelling of prophet Yusuf can help students to master grammar. A study about an analysis of grammatical errors in writing recount text by tenth graders conducted by Amelia, Rachmajanti, & Anugerahwati (2021) shows that most of the students had the grammatical error in writing a recount text. The findings also indicated that most students did not grasp how the grammar should be applied in sentences.

The writer considers the use of story-based approach as a learning strategy to improve the eighth graders skill in writing personal essays in SMPN 18 Malang. This study aims to solve the problems confronted by the English teacher and the students, to know whether or not a story-based approach can improve the students' writing skill ability in a personal essay in the form of a recount text, and to obtain information from the students' response toward the application of story-based approach to practice writing. Theoretically, this study can contribute to giving more understanding about the teaching-learning process by applying story-based approach to improve students' skill in writing. Practically, this study contributes to the English teachers as a reference to teach writing and grammar acquisition, principal to reference in making decisions whether this strategy can be applied in that school or not, and further researchers who have the same interest to study the same case or develop the idea.

2. Method

This research uses Classroom Action Research (CAR) design. CAR design is a systematic procedure used by teachers or other individuals in an academic setting to gather data and address improvements in their educational setting, their teaching, and the learning of their students (Creswell, 2003). CAR is conducted to solve any problem confronted by the students or the teacher related to the educational field like attitude, knowledge, and creativity of the students. The approach that is applied in the language learning field, especially in improving writing skill and grammatical mastery is called story-based approach. This is one solution to create a feasible learning environment, as students mostly think that learning grammar is categorized as a boring and confusing course. In addition, story is something fun, and each person in this world has their own story in the past, nor, or future.

Furthermore, the writer uses classroom action research which refers to the multiple spiral models of Kemmis and Mc Taggart models to conduct the research (Kemmis & Mc Taggart, 1998). Kemmis and Mc Taggart's model has four steps that must be done namely 1) planning, 2) action, 3) observation, and 4) reflection (Kemmis and Mc Taggart, 1998). Those four steps are done in one cycle. However, when the first cycle is presumed to be unsuccessful by the reflection, the second cycle should be done. The four steps are shown in Figure 1:

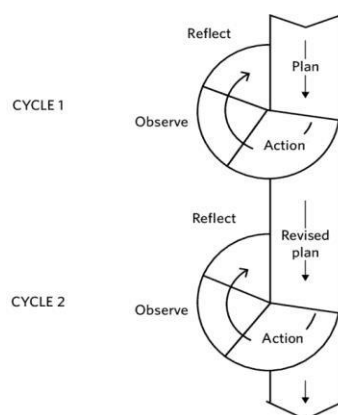


Figure 1. Kemmis and Mc Taggart's model

Planning includes having an interview session with an English teacher in the subject area or in SMPN 18 Malang to gain information about students' problems in the classroom during the English

learning process. The problems that should be known are the students' attitude, knowledge, and skill toward English skill in general, especially writing and grammatical mastery. In addition, the researcher gains more information related to learning technique and strategy that have been applied previously as well as students' response and participation. Based on the interview session, the writer could see that the students in VIII-B of SMPN 18 Malang have a lack of concentration during English lessons. As a result, only a few students can reach the criteria minimum score in the English test, and there are some students who used to be late in assignments or homework submission. In addition, the result of the interview revealed that the students become less interested in the learning process after about two years learning at home due to COVID-19 pandemic. During distance learning, the students' English skills were infrequently trained as well as the writing skill. Based on the findings of the interview section, the writer formulated a lesson plan and learning media to improve students' writing skill and grammatical mastery. In addition, to plan this study, the writer prepares the lesson plan for each meeting, composing a blueprint for the instruments, and creating some interesting learning media.

The next step is action. At this step, the researcher takes note of the class to observe the students' reaction, participation, and enthusiasm during the activities. Those aspects can be seen and observed from the documentation during the learning process. It includes students' expression, behavior, and attitude in each meeting to recognize their eagerness in learning English. There is 1 cycle in this study. The researcher as well as a teacher applies some activities in the first cycle. Before the strategy or approach is applied, the teacher gives the students a preliminary study. Then, the students are given some recount texts, and the students work in groups of four to look up some sentences in past tense forms, and they conclude the pattern of past tense form. Afterwards, the students make some sentences in past tense forms. Learning past tense forms can be used as a bridge to compose a recount text. In the final, the students grasp grammatical mastery and are able to compose a recount text based on their own memorable experience.

The third step is observation which aims to recognize students' improvement and participation during the learning process, and it can be observed from the improvement between preliminary study and writing test. Furthermore, the writer also observes herself of the strategy that has been applied and progresses from one meeting to another using observation fields. There are some aspects that are observed, like the group submission sheet of grammar, submission sheet of recount text, and students' progress.

The last step is reflection. The reflection is obtained from the preliminary study and writing test. It aims to answer whether there is any improvement for students' writing skill between the preliminary study and writing test or not. The reflection concludes the result and the process of the strategy being applied during the learning process. In addition, the author unsured the data by herself and asked for a collaborator from interrater to obtain the interrater reliability in order to ensure that the data is valid and have attained the criteria of success.

To obtain the expected data, the researcher used some instruments to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data was obtained from the interview section, observation, and field notes. Meanwhile, the quantitative data was obtained from preliminary study and writing test.

The interview section was implemented before and after the strategy was applied. It was done with the English teacher and four students of 8B who are categorized as a diligent student, a smart student, and the two are the opposites. The preliminary study is given at the very beginning of the meeting, and the writing test is given at the end of the cycle. Observation and field notes are obtained during the strategy and learning approach.

There were two types of data analysis techniques used in this classroom action research: qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques. The technique to obtain the students' writing score is adapted from Jacob (1981) in which the writing rubric score consists of five aspects. The first aspect is the content (30%) that has the range score between 30-13. In scoring the content, the aspect that should be focused is from the paragraph unity, the relevance of the topic of the text. Second is the organization (20%) which focuses on the cohesive, sequence of the sentences, and the supporting idea. The range score is between 20-7. The third aspect is obtained by the students' vocabulary used (20%). It focuses on the effectiveness of word usage and word form mastery, and the range is 20-7.

The next aspect is definitely the grammatical use in the text (25%). In recount text, the grammatical feature is the use of past tense form. The range score for the grammar is 25-5. The last aspect is the mechanics (5%) in which it relates to the punctuation and the word spelling of the text written by the students.

In addition, the formula of mean used by the researcher between the preliminary study and writing test is as follows:

$$X = \frac{\sum X}{N} \tag{1}$$

Description:

- X = Mean score
- $\sum X_i$ = Total score
- N = Number of subjects Source: Gay (1981)

This research would be considered as a successful study if the results could attain the criteria of success that was considered to measure whether or not the implementation of story-based approach can help the students in improving the personal essay writing skill. There were three criteria of success of this study. Firstly, there must be improvement in the students' score from preliminary study to writing test as shown in chart 1. Secondly, the average score of the students had to reach 70 as the minimum passing grade of SMPN 18 Malang. Thirdly, there must be more than or equal to 70% of the students who participated actively during the learning process.

Table 1. The Minimum Score of the Criteria of Success

Categories (max score)	Criteria of Success
Content (30)	22
Organization (20)	14
Vocabulary (20)	14
Grammar (25)	18
Mechanics (5)	2
Total score (100)	70

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Students' Writing Progress by Applying Story-Based Approach

Story-based approach shows good contribution for foreign language learners including to practice writing. However, there should be some difficulties confronted by the students in writing, and this approach is one of the strategies that can be applied. The difficulty in writing is translating from Indonesian into English because most of students have the least English vocabulary (K. A. Aditya, personal communication, April 5, 2023). From the quote, we can conclude that the students lack English vocabulary, so the students wrote the recount text briefly in preliminary study. It reveals that students needed more reading text. Therefore, the researcher provided some pieces of papers which accommodated some recount text or someone's experience story in the past. Another factor that caused the students' score in preliminary study still insufficient for the passing grade score was that the students did not use the appropriate tenses for telling a story in the past. Most of them still made mistakes in tenses and the use of verbs. Most of the students wrote the sentence by using to be and then followed by verb 1.

In addition, there are some students who create a description text, in which they explain and describe their pet. Those are some cases that the researcher experienced during the preliminary study section. In the third meeting, the researcher required the students to work in a group in order to create a recount text regarding one of the most wonderful experiences owned by one of the group members or the story modification of theirs. However, in the previous meeting, the researcher gave the students some stories and exercises which guide the students to enable them to compose a recount text. The students have the foundation of the grammar mastery. For instance, the students had to look for the sentences using past tense form in some texts and then wrote down the complete sentences. Afterward, the students concluded the pattern of simple past tense with their group members. To settle the pattern, the researcher explained the pattern and gave the students an explanation toward simple past tense. Then, the students create some sentences in past tense

discussing with their group members. Those activities basically guided the students to compose a recount text. Each group should be able to compose one recount text consisting at least three paragraphs based on its generic structure. During the group discussion in composing the text, the researcher used to walk around to check the students' progress and help the students whether they have difficulties or not. They can learn how to write with their group members.



Figure 2. The Situation of a Group Discussion

Some students interviewed by the researcher agreed that they preferred to do the assignment in groups because they can share and discuss with others (A. N. Khumairoh, personal communication, April 5, 2023). To practice writing for the beginner, it is better done in group discussion (K. A. Aditya, personal communication, April 5, 2023) when the researcher asked them a question about their preference between working individually or in a group. The students could share their story and contributed some ideas to the group to complete the text with the appropriate content, organization, and grammar.

What the students have done in the third meeting or in the writing section is aimed to enable each of them to compose a recount text individually. In writing test, the students were supposed to compose a recount text individually. Almost all of them can write down three paragraphs classified by the orientation, events, and re-orientation. Their sentences were in past tense, as they told their past experience. For more details, the following table represents the comparison of the students' average score among preliminary study and writing test:

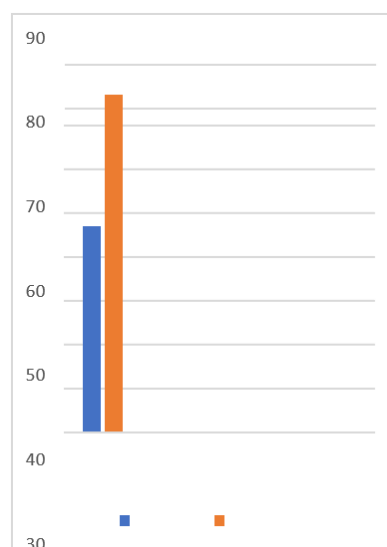


Figure 3. The Students' Writing Score

From the chart above, it was shown that there was a significant improvement between the average students' writing score in preliminary study (47.00) and writing test (77.00). It was probed that the improvements were due to the students' understanding of grammar use, a recount text

organization, and story acquisition in the second and the third meeting. From the interview section conducted with the students of 8B whether or not there was an improvement between the preliminary study and the writing test. The students' understanding and writing were improved during the writing test. There was improvement because the students started loving writing through stories (D. A. Nugroho, personal communication, April 5, 2023). That is why this study has only one cycle. It is inter-related to the criteria of success of this study that has been accomplished the passing grade score in SMPN 18 Malang.

From the interview session conducted with the English teacher, it was told that one of the problems faced by the English teacher in that class was that the students had a lack of concentration, and there were still some students who submitted the assignment late. In addition, it needed quite an effort to build and improve the students' skill as well as writing nowadays, as the students used to engage the learning process online for about two years. Therefore, the students had limited sentences when they were required to write in English, and they still some mistakes dealing with grammar. That is why most of the teachers survive to look for and apply any appropriate and interesting learning method to encourage students in learning language. Grammar is an important part in learning English as well as writing. When learners cannot genuinely understand grammar, they cannot produce a good language. Grammar is a way to organize the sentence and create good language (Hirai, 2010). Grammar can also be said as forming sentences from the combination of some words to have meaningful context. Related to writing skill, grammar plays an important role. Without correct grammatical sentences and form, the sentences have different meanings and raise misconceptions. Writing and grammar are linked to each other and cannot be separated (Sadiah & Royani, 2019). Mastering grammar rules will make the writing understandable and interesting.

During the preliminary study, most of the students were still confused about what they are going to write in their test paper, as they have no clue how they should organize the sentences and the paragraphs. In addition, the researcher who taught the classroom revealed that most of the students' writing in preliminary study was quite short, and consisted of less than 10 sentences. However, the researcher has told the students what they should do in the test and gave the students an explanation that the students were required to write down their memorable, funny, or unforgettable experience they had in the past. The best way to test people's writing ability is to get them to write (Marbun & Siahaan, 2019). That statement can be the guidance and motivation for someone who wants to improve their writing skills, as the more students practice, the more competent they are. In preliminary study, the students' score is still low, and it has improvement after being trained and discussing with group members, and the story can be a great choice as a media for learning because it can amuse the students, and the students can learn from its moral value which relates to what curriculum 2013 maintains that students should have good attitude both socially and spiritually (Koyuncuoglu, 2021).

There must be the advantage and disadvantage for every strategy applied, as well as in story-based approach. The advantage of learning by using a story-based approach is that the students can learn both grammar and writing at the same time. The grammar as a guidance for writing. In addition, story-based approach is considered to be an interesting way to practice, as it explains an interesting and memorable thing from the writer's personal experience in the past (Brewer, 2021). The concept and the content of the story can be the ideal references. However, the story-based approach is sometimes boring, as the students have to face some texts.

The study has been done for one cycle, as it has accomplished the criteria of success from the knowledge, skill, and attitude aspects. For the skill aspect, there was an improvement of students' score in writing. In the beginning, the students only wrote 1 up to 6 sentences, but in the writing test, almost all of the students could write more than 6 sentences organizing based on its generic structure extensively. In addition, the students' improvement of using correct grammatical sentences could be seen from the writing test, and it is categorized as the knowledge improvement. For the attitude, it can be seen that most of the students have to work and discuss the assignment with the group members. Therefore, they had to be able to cooperate with their friends and be responsible for their task.

Table 2. The Students' Attainment of Criteria of Success

Categories (max score)	Preliminary Study	Writing Test
Content (30)	15	22
Organization (20)	10	17
Vocabulary (20)	9	16
Grammar (25)	8	18
Mechanics (5)	3	3
Total score (100)	47	77

The table above shows that the students attained the criteria of success of each category regarding the Jacob's assessment technique for writing as a good category.

3.2. The Students' Response toward the Application of Story-based Approach

In a story-based approach, the students were given some stories, then they are required to identify the grammar rule. In this occasion, the students are supposed to learn simple past tense as a modal before writing a recount text. As a result, the activities conducted are mostly about a recount text. The media used in this application was by using some papers consisting of some stories and exercises for the students. One of the strategies is by applying stories in the learning process because in stories, a person can learn so many things such as the moral value, grammar, content, and vocabulary. The students could undoubtedly learn many things.

Each group got some pieces of papers consisting of some activities. The researcher explained what should be done with activity 1-3 because it relates to each other. In the first activity, the students were required to underline some sentences which are in the past tense form in two recount texts. In the second activity, the students then wrote down some sentences from the texts which are in past tense form. Then, in activity 3, the students conclude the pattern of simple past tense in verbal and nomina. During these activities, the researcher walked around the classroom to know the students' progress and guided the students who needed help. Most of them understood what activity 2 and activity 3 mean. The researcher also asked the students whether they could grasp what the two texts mean or not, and the answered that they could understand the content and the context of the two texts. Then, the students summarize the pattern. Afterward, the students try to make some sentences using simple past tense before composing a recount text.

To know the students' response toward the application story-based approach, the researcher distributed questionnaire to the students after the strategy was done in four meeting. The students filled out the questionnaire by using google form. There were five questions that represented the students' interest and opinion toward this strategy. The students had to decide one of four choices among strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The questions were in the form of positive expression. The first statement inquired the students' opinion that they loved learning by using stories. The next statement was about the understanding of the story. The third statement inquired the students that the stories were interesting. The next statement was that the students could understand the stories well, and the last statement inquired the agreement that the students felt happy while learning by using stories.

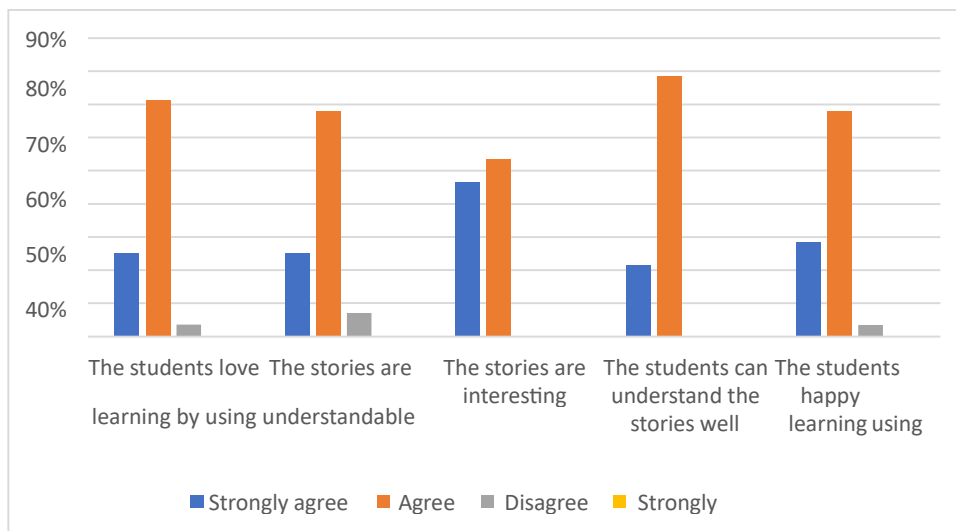


Figure 4. The Students' Perception of the Stories

The chart above shows that the majority of the students love learning by using stories (25% strongly agree, 71.4% agree, and 3.6% disagree). Then, the students also thought that the stories are understandable (25% strongly disagree, 67.9% agree, and 7.1% disagree). 46.4% students strongly agree that the stories are interesting, and the rest students agree. 78.6% of the students agree that they can understand the story well, and the 21.4% strongly agree. Moreover, 28.6% of the students strongly agree, 67.9% disagree, whilst 3.5% disagree that they felt happy while learning by using stories.

Story-based approach can be called as one of the learning language methods that can be applied with varied materials. This approach was applied for improving the students' English skill, and a lot of students are interested in this approach. It was applied based on theory of writing which is categorized as a productive skill. Therefore, there should be preparation both mental and physical (Nunan, 2003). Brewer (2021) gave a definition that in personal essay which learn through story is a nonfiction writing which shares an interesting story from the writer's personal experience, and it is considered as an interesting way of learning. When the students write, it can improve their language skill. The more someone trains, the better result they will achieve. During the learning process, the students could follow the procedures that was given by the researcher as well as the teacher by contributing in group discussion, sharing the story with the group members, and writing a recount text based on their own experience.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to describe how a story-based approach can improve the students' skill in writing personal essays and to solve the problems to know whether or not a story-based approach can improve the students' writing skill ability in a personal essay in the form of a recount text, and to obtain information from the students' response toward the application of story-based approach to practice writing. The approach used in this study can be applied for some other materials in grammar. In this study, the researcher applies for learning simple past tense combined for improving the writing ability. The limitation of this study is that this strategy is applied for the simple past tense and combined with recount text in a class which has problems about their motivation in learning English. The current study contributes not only for teaching and learning grammar, but also writing skill for SMPN 18 Malang. In addition, this study hopefully can contribute to enabling the education field in learning by using stories for young learners and college students to enable students to conduct an easy and hilarious learning process.

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