

Strengthening English Writing Ability of Students of SMP IT Cendekia Pematangsiantar Class VII Through Pro Writing Aids as Creative and Interactive Media

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ABSTRACT

This community service activity was conducted to improve the English writing skills of Grade VII students at SMP IT Cendekia Pematangsiantar, particularly in sentence structure and vocabulary. The main objective was to enhance students' writing ability through the use of ProWritingAid as a creative and interactive technology-based tool. The methods used included socialization, a short training session, and hands-on practice during a one-day activity involving 15 student participants. The activity was carried out actively and interactively, with direct guidance as students explored key features of the application. ProWritingAid proved useful through its grammar correction, sentence structure analysis, and writing style support. Some challenges were encountered, such as limited internet quota and restricted access to premium features. However, students showed improvement in constructing more coherent and grammatically correct English paragraphs. They also became more confident and motivated to write. This program demonstrated that the use of interactive digital media can effectively support the development of writing skills among junior high school students.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the essential English language skills students must master in the era of globalization. In education, writing serves not only as an indicator of language proficiency but also as a medium for developing students' critical thinking, creativity, and self-expression. Unfortunately, initial observations at SMP IT Cendekia Pematangsiantar revealed that the English writing skills of Grade VII students remain low. Common errors include incorrect sentence structure, poor grammar, and limited vocabulary, all of which negatively affect the overall quality of students' written work.

This issue is not unique to the partner school but reflects a broader challenge faced by many schools in Indonesia. According to Putri & Santosa (2021), many students struggle to organize coherent and cohesive paragraphs due to limited writing practice and the lack of engaging learning media. Lestari (2019) also noted that technology-based learning tools have proven effective in increasing student interest and motivation, particularly in developing writing skills.

The partner for this community service program is SMP IT Cendekia Pematangsiantar, involving 15 seventh-grade students. Discussions with English teachers indicated that writing instruction has not yet utilized

digital media effectively. The current learning model is largely conventional and lacks interactive elements that allow students to explore their ideas creatively. This aligns with Syahputra & Rahman (2020), who emphasized that the absence of interactive media in language learning can reduce the effectiveness of knowledge transfer.

Previously, the authors conducted similar community service activities in other schools facing similar writing challenges. Those activities showed noticeable improvements in students' writing quality when supported by artificial intelligence-based tools. Applications such as ProWritingAid have been shown to provide immediate and detailed feedback, which significantly helps students improve their writing independently (Lubis & Tanjung, 2022).

The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture also promotes the integration of digital technology in learning through its "Merdeka Belajar" policy. This provides a strong foundation for implementing technology-based community service initiatives aligned with both current educational needs and the advancement of students' digital literacy (Kemendikbudristek, 2021). With policy support, schools are encouraged to innovate and improve learning quality through the integration of educational technology.

Based on the background above, this community service activity aims to improve the English writing ability of Grade VII students at SMP IT Cendekia Pematangsiantar through the use of ProWritingAid as a creative and interactive writing tool.

METHOD

This community service activity was carried out using a participatory approach involving socialization, workshop, and guided writing practice. The activity was implemented by a team from the English Education Department of Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar, Indonesia, in collaboration with SMP IT Cendekia Pematangsiantar. A total of 15 seventh-grade students participated actively in the session, which was conducted in a classroom setting with the support of English subject teachers. The activity utilized ProWritingAid, a writing assistant software, as a tool to improve students' writing quality through grammar correction, vocabulary enhancement, and sentence structure analysis. The implementation was divided into three stages:



Figure 1. Series of Community Service Activities

1. Phase 1: Preparation

a). Formal Letter Submission

The implementing team submitted an official letter to SMP IT Cendekia Pematangsiantar to outline the objectives, schedule, and structure of the planned community service program.

b). Coordination with School Authorities

After receiving approval, the team visited the school to meet with the principal and English subject teacher. The coordination meeting discussed implementation details, selected the target class (Grade VII), set the activity schedule, and identified necessary facilities.

c). Identifying Student Needs and Conditions

The English teacher provided insights into students' writing abilities, learning habits, and common challenges in writing English texts.

d). Lesson Planning

The team created a lesson plan that included:

- Introduction to English writing
- Structured writing exercises
- Step-by-step use of ProWritingAid
- Reflection and feedback session

e). Preparation of Media and Materials

- Designed presentation slides and tutorial videos
- Printed worksheets and writing task sheets
- Prepared scoring rubrics, attendance lists, evaluation forms, and observation sheets
- Tested internet connection and ProWritingAid accessibility
- Checked classroom tools: projector, speakers, and laptop

f). Technical Readiness and Logistics

- Installed and simulated ProWritingAid usage
- Prepared backup internet (hotspot) in case of connectivity issues

- Ensured documentation tools (camera/smartphone) were ready

2. Phase 2: Impementation

a). Opening Session

The facilitator began by greeting the students and briefly introducing the purpose of the activity. The importance of writing in English was explained, especially in academic and real-life contexts.

b). Introduction to Digital Writing Tools

Students were introduced to the concept of using digital tools to improve writing skills. The facilitator explained how ProWritingAid works and demonstrated its main features, including grammar correction, style suggestions, vocabulary enhancement, and readability feedback.



Figure 2. Explains writing strategies and demonstrates how AI-based media like ProWritingAid can strengthen writing outcomes

c). Live Demonstration

A sample paragraph was input into ProWritingAid using a laptop and projected on screen. The facilitator showed how the tool provides detailed feedback on sentence structure, grammar, clarity, and word choice.



Figure 3. Using ProWritingAid, a student refines their writing by responding to automatic grammar and style suggestions

d). Guided Writing Practice

Students were given writing prompts to compose a short descriptive paragraph manually. After completing their drafts, they were guided step-by-step to enter their text into ProWritingAid and review the feedback.

- e). Individual and Pair Work

Students worked either individually or in pairs, depending on device availability. The facilitator and English teacher moved around the classroom to assist with interpreting ProWritingAid suggestions and making improvements.
 - f). Interactive Correction Session

Students revised their writing based on the tool's suggestions. Selected examples were shared and discussed with the whole class to reinforce common corrections and encourage peer learning.
 - g). Motivational Support

Positive reinforcement was given throughout the activity. The facilitator encouraged students to view mistakes as learning opportunities and to continue using the tool independently after the session.
3. Phase 3: Evaluation
- a). Evaluation Objectives

The evaluation phase aimed to assess both the implementation process and the outcomes of the writing improvement activity using ProWritingAid. It focused on measuring students' engagement, learning progress, and overall experience.
 - b). Evaluation Methods
 - Observation: Conducted during the activity to monitor student participation, attentiveness, and responsiveness when using the ProWritingAid tool.
 - Writing Comparison: Students' initial writing drafts (before using ProWritingAid) were compared with revised versions to identify improvements in grammar, vocabulary, and coherence.
 - Reflection and Feedback Session: Students were asked to reflect on their experience and share their thoughts about the tool through open discussion.
 - Informal Interviews: Short interviews with students and the English teacher were conducted to gain qualitative insights on the perceived benefits and challenges.
 - c). Evaluation Results
 - Students showed high interest and active involvement during the workshop.
 - Most students demonstrated noticeable improvements in sentence accuracy, word choice, and organization of ideas.
 - The feedback from ProWritingAid helped students identify and correct common mistakes independently.
 - Students expressed increased confidence and motivation in writing English texts after using the application.
 - The teacher noted that students were more enthusiastic compared to regular writing lessons.
 - d). Post-Activity Recommendations
 - Teachers are encouraged to integrate digital tools like ProWritingAid regularly in writing lessons.
 - Follow-up sessions or assignments using the same application could help reinforce the learning.
 - Schools should consider improving digital access to support similar technology-based learning programs in the future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Phase 1: Preparation

The community service program began with a well-structured and systematic preparation phase. The implementing team submitted an official request letter to SMP IT Cendekia Pematangsiantar, outlining the objectives, timeline, and nature of the activity. Upon approval, a coordination meeting was held with the school principal and the English teacher to finalize the schedule, target class (Grade VII), and necessary facilities such as classroom space, projector, and internet access. During this meeting, the teacher shared valuable insights about students' challenges in writing, including issues with grammar, sentence construction, and limited vocabulary. These findings became the foundation for designing a targeted lesson plan that included an introduction to English writing, guided practice using ProWritingAid, and a reflection session. The team also prepared presentation slides, student worksheets, scoring rubrics, and conducted a technical check of internet connectivity, speakers, and the projector to ensure everything would function smoothly on the day of the activity.

2. Phase 2: Implementation

The main activity was conducted in the form of a one-day workshop involving 15 seventh-grade students. The session began with an explanation of the importance of writing skills in English and how technology like ProWritingAid can support improvement. Students were asked to write a short paragraph independently as a form of pre-assessment. The facilitator then demonstrated how to use ProWritingAid to

check grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary usage. Students were guided to revise their initial drafts using the application, receiving instant feedback and learning how to identify and correct their own mistakes. Throughout the session, students worked actively, engaging in the revision process while asking questions and seeking clarification. The workshop concluded with a reflection session, during which students shared their experiences, expressed what they had learned, and gave feedback about using the tool in class.

3. Phase 3: Evaluation

Evaluation was carried out to measure both the implementation process and the outcomes achieved. Observations during the activity showed high levels of student engagement and curiosity. Most students showed visible improvement in their revised drafts compared to their initial writing, particularly in sentence structure, grammatical accuracy, and vocabulary usage. Their writing became more cohesive and logically organized. Through a post-activity reflection and informal interviews, many students expressed that they felt more confident and independent in writing. They appreciated the real-time feedback offered by the application and were motivated to continue practicing. The English teacher also confirmed that the students were more enthusiastic and focused compared to traditional writing sessions. This suggests that integrating digital tools in language learning not only enhances technical writing skills but also boosts students' motivation and confidence.

4. Challenges in Using ProWritingAid

Despite the positive outcomes, several technical and logistical challenges emerged during the activity. One of the main issues was the limited internet connectivity, which at times disrupted access to ProWritingAid, especially when multiple students tried to use it simultaneously. In addition, the limited number of devices meant students had to take turns, reducing the amount of practice time for each student. Another challenge was the restriction of features in the free version of ProWritingAid, which limited the exploration of some advanced tools. Some students also faced initial difficulties navigating the interface and interpreting feedback from the application, as it was their first time using AI-powered writing software. Lastly, the one-day workshop format limited the amount of writing and revision time, making it difficult to cover everything in-depth within a single session.

5. Things We Can Do to Overcome Challenges

To address the challenges experienced during the implementation, several solutions can be considered for future activities. First, preparing a backup internet connection, such as a mobile hotspot, can ensure stable access to the application. Second, dividing students into smaller groups and rotating device usage would allow for more efficient and focused practice. Third, although the premium features were unavailable, the free version of ProWritingAid already provides substantial feedback on grammar, clarity, and word usage—sufficient for introductory-level writing practice. Fourth, a brief tutorial at the beginning of the session can help familiarize students with the application interface and reduce confusion. Finally, assigning follow-up tasks or homework that involves using ProWritingAid independently can extend the learning beyond the classroom and allow students to continue improving at their own pace. These adjustments would not only improve the experience but also ensure that digital writing tools are more effectively integrated into classroom learning.



Figure 4. Final group photo with participants from SMP IT Cendekia Pematangsiantar Grade VII Al Ikhlas

CONCLUSION

This community service activity successfully achieved its goal of improving the English writing skills of Grade VII students at SMP IT Cendekia Pematangsiantar through the use of ProWritingAid as a creative and interactive digital tool. The integration of AI-assisted feedback encouraged independent learning, improved grammar accuracy, and increased students' writing confidence. Scientifically, this activity contributes to the practice of technology-based language education at the junior high school level. It is recommended that similar programs be continued and developed further to support sustainable digital literacy and student-centered learning in the future.

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