

Submitted : 14-12-2025	Accepted : 31-12-2025
Revised : 25-12-2025	Published : 06-01-2026

The Effect of PLEASE Strategy as Metacognitive Learning for Vocational Students' Writing Skill

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Abstract

Writing is a crucial skill in learning English. Yet, many students, especially those in vocational high school, still struggle to master it. This study investigated the effect of the PLEASE strategy, a metacognitive learning strategy, on students' writing performance. A quasi-experimental design was applied to two tenth-grade classes in the 2024/2025 academic year, consisting of 37 students in the experimental group and 38 students in the control group. The data were collected through essay writing tests on report texts across twelve meetings, including a pre-test, treatments using the PLEASE strategy, and a post-test. Additionally, a questionnaire was administered to explore students' perceptions of the strategy. Pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed using paired and independent samples t-test, which confirmed that the effectiveness was statistically significant. The results showed that the experimental group achieved significantly higher post-test scores than the control group. The most notable improvement was found in mechanics, followed by grammar and organization, while progress was also observed in vocabulary. These findings suggest that the PLEASE strategy is effective for teaching writing in a vocational context and may be applied to other writing genres in future practice.

Keywords: *Writing Skill, PLEASE Strategy, Metacognitive Learning, Quantitative Method, Report Text*

Introduction

Writing is a fundamental skill in learning English because it allows students to organize and express ideas clearly (Graham et al., 2012). Yet, it is widely considered one of the most difficult skill to master. Many students worldwide struggle with writing, which negatively impacts both their academic success and career readiness (Brey, n.d.). In Indonesia, the challenge is particularly visible among vocational students. Limited vocabulary and weak grammar lower students' confidence (Rasool et al., 2023), while many students in Palembang struggled to organize texts effectively (Ammarullah, 2020). Similarly, Toba et al. (2019) observed that writing is often neglected in classroom instruction, resulting in insufficient practice and poor outcomes.

Several recent studies also confirm these issues. Mitha Barida et al. (2025) showed that the self-correction technique significantly improved junior high school students' texts in Palembang, as reflected in their increased mean scores and enhanced independence in recognizing errors. These findings suggest that active strategies can raise students' awareness of mistakes and strengthen their writing performance. In line with this, Surayatika (2016) earlier emphasized that vocabulary limitations, inability to revise, and fear of criticism often hinder students' writing development. Such challenges, especially in vocabulary, grammar, and revising skills, highlight the need for a strategy that can provide structured guidance and foster learner autonomy.

One promising approach to address these challenges is metacognitive learning. Research shows that effective writers plan, monitor, and reflect on their work (Simarmata & Sulistyaningrum, 2023). Combining metacognitive and critical thinking strategies also strengthens students' writing (Murtadho, 2021). Other studies found that structured metacognitive instruction improved coherence, accuracy, and confidence in writing

(Riwayatiningsih et al., 2025). Reviews further confirm that metacognitive strategies are dominant in academic writing (Nadhifah et al., 2023). Similarly, Prihandoko et al. (2024) found that self-efficacy, metacognition, and a growth mindset significantly predicted the academic writing performance of Indonesian EFL students. In this regard, the PLEASE strategy, as a structured metacognitive technique, directly guides students to plan, organize, and review their writing, thereby addressing these core issues.

However, previous studies also note that students still struggle with limited vocabulary, poor grammar, and a lack of idea organization. The PLEASE strategy responds to these challenges through its structured steps. In the Pick and List steps, students brainstorm and gather vocabulary and ideas, while the Evaluate step helps them check grammar and sentence structure. Through Activate and Supply, they expand sentences and provide supporting details, and the End stage guides them to complete a coherent composition. By systematically addressing vocabulary, grammar, and organization, the PLEASE strategy provides a practical response to the common writing problems identified in earlier research. In addition, students' metacognitive strategy patterns in academic writing often involve planning, monitoring, and revising, especially in online learning contexts (Meinawati et al., 2021), and planning has been identified as the most influential form of regulation in writing tasks (Allostath, 2021). These findings suggest that metacognitive strategies guide students to become more aware, organized, and independent in their writing.

An effective example of a metacognitive strategy is the PLEASE (Pick, List, Evaluate, Activate, Supply, End) strategy (Utami et al., 2025). Moreover, Haukas et al. (2018) highlight its role in promoting metacognitive awareness in the writing process, and also increased engagement through student involvement in planning and evaluation.

However, its implementation in Indonesian vocational schools remains underexplored. Asri (2022) has only begun investigating its potential. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of the PLEASE strategy in enhancing vocational students' writing skill. It is expected that this approach will help students better organize ideas, strengthen sentence structure and coherence, and better prepare them for academic demands, future careers, and professional communication.

Method

This study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental control group design, which is commonly applied when random assignment is not possible, but researchers still aim to compare the effects of a treatment (Capili & Anastasi, 2024). The participants were 75 tenth-grade students' academic year 2024/2025 of the Computer and Network Engineering program at SMK Negeri 2 Palembang, consisting of 37 students in the experimental group and 38 students in the control group, selected through convenience sampling, which, as Andrade (2021) explain, is frequently used in educational research when a researcher must rely on accessible groups already determined by the institution.

A quasi-experimental approach was chosen instead of a randomized controlled trial (RCT) because the school had predetermined class groupings, making randomization impractical. Unlike RCTs, quasi-experiments cannot fully control for pre-existing differences between groups, and the use of convenience sampling reduces the generalizability of findings. To minimize these limitations, both groups were drawn from the same grade level and academic track, ensuring a reasonable level of comparability (Fraenkel, 2009).

The study was conducted over 12 meetings, including a pre-test, treatment sessions, and a post-test, combined with a questionnaire in the

final meeting. The experimental group was taught using the PLEASE strategy, while the control group received the traditional method, which mainly involved teacher-centered explanations, textbook-based exercises, and individual writing practice without explicit guidance on planning or organizing ideas. This condition was maintained to represent the standard instructional practice commonly applied in the school.

The instruments used were a writing test and a questionnaire. The writing test, short report-text essays, covered four topics: Elephant, Tsunami, Batik, and Traditional Markets. Students' writing was assessed using Brown's (2007) adapted scoring rubric, which evaluates five aspects: Content, Organization, Grammar, Vocabulary, and Mechanics. The questionnaire, designed on a 5-point Likert scale (Taufiqulloh et al., 2025), was distributed after the post-test to collect students' perceptions of the PLEASE strategy in the experimental class. Data were analyzed quantitatively by comparing the students' pre-test and post-test scores. Normality and homogeneity were tested first (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012; Pallant, 2020). Then, paired samples t-test and independent samples t-test were calculated using SPSS to determine the effectiveness of the treatment.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented through descriptive statistics, statistical tests, and a questionnaire to capture students' perceptions of the PLEASE strategy. To provide a fuller picture of the score distribution, additional indicators such as range, skewness, and kurtosis were also reported. The descriptive analysis shows that the students' scores in the pre-test and post-test differed between the experimental and control groups.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test Scores in the Experimental Group

Score Range	Category	Experimental Group (Pre-test)		
		Frequency / Percentage	Mean	SD
8.0 – 10.0	A (Very Good)	0 (0.00%)	-	-
7.0 – 7.9	B Good)	0 (0.00%)	7.0625	-
6.0 – 6.9	C (Fair)	4 (10.81%)	6.4500	0.35740
5.0 – 5.9	D (Poor)	5 (13.51%)	5.3646	0.28806
< 5.0	E (Very Poor)	28 (75.68%)	4.1053	0.74245
Total	37 (100%)	4.9105	1.08808	
Range	2.50-6.3125			
Skewness	0.153			
Kurtosis	-0.313			

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Post-test Scores in the Experimental Group

Score Range	Category	Experimental Group (Post-test)		
		Frequency / Percentage	Mean	SD
8.0 – 10.0	A (Very Good)	0 (0.00%)	-	-
7.0 – 7.9	B Good)	1 (2.70%)	7.0625	-
6.0 – 6.9	C (Fair)	5 (13.51%)	6.4500	0.35740
5.0 – 5.9	D (Poor)	12 (32.43%)	5.3646	0.28806
< 5.0	E (Very Poor)	19 (51.35%)	4.1053	0.74245
Total	37 (100%)	4.9105	1.08808	
Range	2.50-7.0625			
Skewness	-0.116			
Kurtosis	-0.227			

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, the mean score of the experimental group’s pre-test was 4.3395 (SD = 0.97211), with most students scoring in the very poor category (75.68%) and only a few in the poor and fair categories. The score distribution ranged from 2.50 to 6.3125, with a skewness of 0.153 and a kurtosis of 0.313, indicating a fairly symmetric and slightly flat distribution.

After the treatment, the post-test mean increased to 4.9105 (SD = 1.08808). The distribution of scores ranged from 2.50 to 7.06, with a skewness of -0.116 and a kurtosis of -0.227, showing a relatively normal distribution. More students reached the fair and good categories, while fewer remained in the very poor category. These findings suggest measurable improvement in students' writing performance after the application of the PLEASE strategy.

Before testing the difference between groups, normality and homogeneity were examined.

Table 3. Normality and Homogeneity Test

Variable	Normality Shapiro-Wilk								Homogeneity			
	Control Group				Experimental Group							
	Statistic R1	Sig.	Statistic R2	Sig.	Statistic R1	Sig.	Statistic R2	Sig.	Levene Statistic	df 1	df 2	Sig.
Pre-test	0.947	0.069	0.967	0.315	0.969	0.391	0.959	0.192	0.160	1	73	0.691
Post-test	0.968	0.348	0.949	0.082	0.972	0.467	0.984	0.847	1.064	1	73	0.209

As presented in Table 2, the Shapiro-Wilk results showed that the data for both groups were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$), while Levene's test indicated equal variances ($p > 0.05$). These results confirm that the use of parametric tests was appropriate.

A paired-samples t-test was then used to compare pre-test and post-test scores within each group.

Table 4. Result of the Paired Sample Test

Paired Differences	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95 % Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Significance	
				Lower	Upper			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pre-test Control – Post-test Control	-0.31908	0.53976	0.08756	-0.49649	-0.14166	-3.644	37	< 0.001	< 0.001
Pre-test Exp – Post-test Exp	-0.57095	0.53545	0.08803	-0.74948	-0.39242	-6.486	36	< 0.001	< 0.001

As shown in Table 3, the paired sample test for the experimental group revealed a significant improvement from pre-test to post-test. The mean difference was -0.57095, with a standard deviation of 0.53545 and a standard error mean of 0.08803. The 95% confidence interval of the difference ranged from -0.74948 to -0.39242. The t-value was -6.486 with 36 degrees of freedom, and the result was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$, two-tailed). These results indicate that students in the experimental group made significant progress after the treatment.

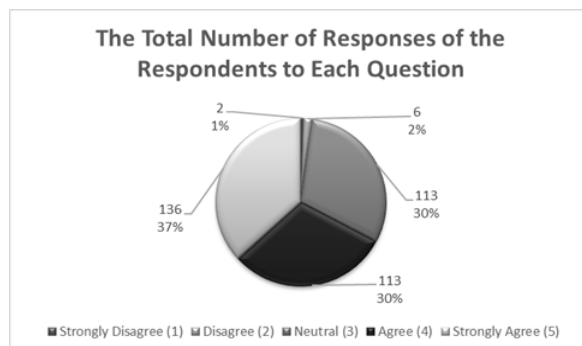
Table 5. Result of the Independent Sample Test

Variable	Independent Sample T-Test					
	Mean Post-Cont	Mean Post-Exp	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Students' Writing Performance	4.3520	4.9105	0.55850	2.489	73	0.015

As shown in Table 4, the post-test mean score of the experimental group ($M = 4.9105$) was significantly higher than that of the control group ($M = 4.3520$), $t(73) = 2.49$, $p = 0.015$. This indicates that the PLEASE strategy was more effective than the traditional method in improving students' writing performance.

In addition to the test results, a questionnaire was distributed to the experimental group to explore students' perceptions of the PLEASE strategy.

Figure 1. Students' Responses to the Questionnaire (Experimental Group)



The overall responses are summarized in Figure 1. The figure shows that most students responded positively, with 37% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing that the strategy helped them in their writing. Approximately 30% of students provided neutral responses, suggesting that some were still adapting, while only 6% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed. These responses demonstrate that the strategy not only improved writing scores but also increased students' confidence and motivation.

These results indicate that although students in both groups showed improvement, the experimental group gained more substantial progress after the treatment. The higher post-test scores, supported by the questionnaire responses, suggest that the PLEASE strategy helped students become more confident and engaged in the writing process.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the PLEASE strategy effectively improved students' writing of report text. The step-by-step process provided students with a clear guide when writing, allowing them to produce more organized and coherent paragraphs. This finding aligns with Razzaq & Hamzah (2023), who demonstrated that structured writing activities facilitate students' critical thinking and enhance their ability to organize

ideas effectively. This result is also consistent with Riwayatiningsih et al. (2025) who found that planning, monitoring, and evaluating significantly improved coherence, accuracy, and clarity in EFL academic writing.

The strategy also worked well because it involves metacognitive processes. Students in the experimental group were asked to plan, monitor, and check their work at every stage. This encouraged them to become more active and responsible in the learning process. By contrast, students in the control group, who were taught using traditional methods, showed less engagement and tended to rely more on teacher guidance. Their progress was more limited, particularly in organizing ideas and correcting grammatical errors. This comparison highlights that the experimental group not only achieved higher writing scores but also demonstrated greater independence and responsibility in managing their learning. Similar to these findings, Qin et al. (2022) found that metacognitive writing strategies support students in being more aware of their own learning and improve their writing results. Furthermore, Simarmata & Sulistyaningrum (2023) observed that EFL writers who engaged in self-reflection and regulation were more successful in managing their writing process. Consistently, Murtadho (2021) highlighted that combining metacognitive and critical thinking strategies had a positive impact on writing performance, further confirming the important role of metacognition.

Another factor that helped was collaboration. At the beginning, students practiced the steps in pairs. This made them more confident and helped them understand the strategy better. Wen & Li (2022) also showed that peer collaboration can increase learners' confidence and improve the quality of their writing. In line with this, Riwayatiningsih et al. (2025) found that metacognitive strategy instruction not only enhanced students' writing performance but also improved their confidence and independence.

The students' feedback in this study confirmed that the PLEASE strategy made writing easier and less stressful. They felt that the process

was systematic and more manageable. This is similar to Wahyuningtyas & Zuhriyah (2024), who found that students gave positive responses to the step-by-step process of the PLEASE strategy. Further support comes from Meinawati et al. (2021), who reported that students practicing planning, monitoring, revising, and evaluating during online classes perceived these strategies as helpful for structuring their writing. Furthermore, a systematic review conducted by Nadhifah et al. (2023) concluded that metacognitive strategies were the most dominant category in academic writing, indicating that learners rely heavily on higher-order regulation. A finding further reinforced by Prihandoko et al. (2024), who highlighted metacognition as a key determinant of writing achievement.

Similarly, Qin et al. (2022) found that planning as a metacognitive regulation strategy was the most effective aspect influencing EFL students' writing performance, which relates to the Pick and List phases of the PLEASE strategy. Nevertheless, not all students improved equally. A small number of students did not show much progress. This lack of progress may be caused by low motivation or external distractions. Ryan & Deci (2020) explained that if learners do not feel motivated or supported, their learning results will not improve even if good strategies are used.

In general, the discussion confirmed that the PLEASE strategy is effective and useful in teaching writing at vocational high schools. It not only helps students improve their report text writing but also trains them to plan, organize, and reflect on their work. These skills are important for their future academic and professional life.

Conclusions

This study examined the effectiveness of the PLEASE strategy on the writing skills of vocational high school students. The findings showed that the experimental group achieved higher post-test scores, indicating

that the PLEASE strategy significantly enhanced writing performance. The questionnaire results also revealed positive student perceptions, with many reporting that the step-by-step process (Pick, List, Evaluate, Activate, Supply, End) made writing clearer and less difficult, especially for beginners. The results suggest that the PLEASE strategy is both effective and practical for teaching writing in vocational high schools. Furthermore, future research could investigate the long-term effects of the PLEASE strategy on sustaining students' writing development, including its application across various writing genres and educational levels.

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