The Impact of Outlining Technique on Seventh Grade Students' Writing

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Abstract

Writing is one of the most challenging skills for students to master in learning English. Many students face difficulties in organizing ideas coherently, developing paragraphs, and using appropriate vocabulary and grammar. The outlining technique, which involves creating a structured plan before writing, is considered an effective strategy to help students improve their writing skills. This study aims to investigate the impact of using the outlining technique on the writing ability of seventh-grade students at SMPN 1 Pakel. This study applied a pre-experimental design with a one-group pre-test and post-test model. The participants were 32 seventh-grade students of class VII-B. The instrument used was a writing test administered as a pre-test before the treatment and a post-test after the treatment. In analyzing the data, a paired-samples t-test was conducted using SPSS to determine whether there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test results. The findings showed that the students' mean score improved from 55.47 in the pre-test to 74.84 in the post-test, indicating an overall increase of 19.37 points. Furthermore, the significance value of $0.00 < 0.05$ confirmed that the outlining technique had a significant effect on students' writing performance. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the outlining technique is effective in improving the writing ability of seventh-grade students at SMPN 1 Pakel.

Keywords: Outlining Technique, Writing Skill, Writing Performance, Junior High School Students

Introduction

English has become a critical global language, serving as a bridge that connects people across different countries and cultures. Its influence is particularly evident in international education and communication settings where proficiency in English is highly valued (Almunawaroh, 2020). In Indonesia, English has been integrated as a mandatory subject from early education to higher learning institutions, reflecting its essential role in academic success. Despite this emphasis, many students still face significant challenges, especially in mastering English writing skills.

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most complex skills to develop in language learning. Students often struggle to generate coherent ideas, construct organized paragraphs, and

use appropriate grammar and vocabulary when expressing their thoughts in writing (Fitria, 2024). These issues frequently result in disorganized, ambiguous writing that lacks clarity and flow. Therefore, educators must explore effective teaching strategies that can directly address these common difficulties and foster students' writing abilities.

One approach that has gained attention is the outlining technique. This strategy offers a practical way to help students arrange their ideas systematically before drafting their essays (Silfia, 2017). Outlining allows learners to plan the structure of their writing, which helps them stay focused and develop their arguments more effectively. By following a clear framework, students can enhance their ability to write logically and cohesively, making the writing process less overwhelming.

The need for structured guidance in writing is especially evident among seventh-grade students, who are still building their foundational writing skills. At this level, students frequently encounter difficulties in organizing their thoughts into well-structured paragraphs, as confirmed by teachers who observe these persistent challenges in the classroom. Without proper intervention, students may continue to produce writing that is poorly organized and lacks depth, limiting their academic progress in English.

Several studies have demonstrated the positive outcomes of applying outlining techniques in writing instruction. Research has shown that outlining contributes to improving students' ability to create coherent, grammatically accurate, and well-structured compositions (Sari, 2019). By providing a step-by-step framework, outlining not only helps students manage their ideas more effectively but also supports the development of their critical thinking skills, enabling them to produce higher-quality writing. Despite its proven benefits, the use of outlining techniques in the context of Indonesian junior high schools, particularly among seventh-grade students, has not been widely explored (Tazky, 2018). Given the persistent writing challenges faced by students at this level, it is essential to investigate how outlining can enhance their writing performance. This study, therefore, aims to examine the impact of the outlining technique on improving the writing abilities of seventh-grade students at SMPN 1 Pakel and contribute valuable insights to English language teaching practices.

To provide a clearer theoretical foundation for this study, it is important to first review key concepts related to writing and outlining. The discussion begins with the concept of writing as a fundamental skill, followed by the stages of the writing process that students typically undergo. Next, the outlining technique is introduced, along with its benefits and practical steps in implementation. Finally, previous studies on outlining are presented to show the relevance of this approach in improving students' writing performance.

The Concept of Writing

Writing is a fundamental skill in language learning that allows students to express their thoughts, opinions, and feelings in a structured manner. According to Harmer (2008:31), writing is a productive activity that requires learners to actively construct and organize their ideas to communicate effectively (Handayani, 2022). Writing is not only about arranging words but also about presenting coherent arguments and maintaining clarity throughout the text. Despite its importance, writing is often perceived as one of the most challenging skills to master because it requires complex processes, including content development, organization, vocabulary selection, grammar application, and mechanical accuracy.

Writing Process

Developing strong writing skills involves several stages that support students in producing well-structured compositions. As described by Negari (2011), the writing process includes prewriting, organizing, drafting, and polishing, where each step contributes to refining the final product. Prewriting helps students to gather ideas and choose appropriate topics, while organizing allows them to structure their thoughts logically. The drafting phase focuses on expressing initial ideas, and polishing involves editing and improving the written work. This process-oriented approach encourages students to focus on both the structure and the content of their writing, making it more effective and coherent.

The Outlining Technique in Writing

The outlining technique has been recognized as a valuable tool to assist students in systematically organizing their ideas before writing. Batubara (2020) emphasized that outlining helps students to develop a logical writing structure by arranging main ideas and supporting details in a clear sequence. By creating an outline, students can visualize the overall structure of their writing, which helps them avoid disorganized thoughts and enhances the clarity of their essays. Outlining also allows writers to identify gaps in their arguments and ensures that each section flows logically to the next.

Benefits of Outlining Technique

Using an outlining strategy can significantly improve students' writing performance. Outlining encourages students to plan their essays carefully, resulting in more coherent and well-organized texts (Putri et al., 2025). Additionally, this technique helps learners to maintain focus on the main topic and to develop their ideas in depth without straying from the intended message. By following a structured outline, students can also enhance their confidence in writing because they have a clear guide to support their progress. This technique not only improves the organization but also positively impacts the overall quality of students' written work.

Steps in Creating an Outline

To apply outlining effectively, students must follow several key steps, starting from topic selection to the development of supporting details. Bisriyah (2022) outlined that students should first select a relevant topic, determine the main idea, and carefully arrange supporting points in a logical order. The structure typically begins with the introduction, followed by the body paragraphs, and concludes with a closing statement. By completing each stage systematically, students are better equipped to write essays that are both logically arranged and easy to understand.

Previous Studies on Outlining Technique

Prior research has shown that the outlining technique effectively enhances writing skills in various educational contexts. For instance, Sari (2019) reported that using outlining techniques improved students' ability to write narrative texts, as it provided a clear framework for organizing their ideas. Other studies, such as those by (Harahap et al., 2024), confirmed that the application of outlining techniques contributes to improvements in writing coherence and structure. These findings indicate that outlining can be a practical and impactful strategy to support students in developing their writing abilities.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a pre-experimental design using the one-group pre-test and post-test model. The purpose of this design was to measure the improvement in students' writing skills before and after the implementation of the outlining technique (Akhtar, 2016). This design was chosen because the research focused on one group of participants without a control group, making it possible to observe the direct impact of the treatment on the same students (Creswell, 2014).

Population and Sample

The population of this research consisted of all seventh-grade students at SMPN 1 Pakel, Tulungagung. The sample was selected purposively, focusing on class VII-B with 32 students (14 boys and 18 girls). This class was chosen because the English teacher reported that students in this group often experienced difficulties in organizing their ideas in writing.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument in this study was a writing test administered as a pre-test and post-test. The test required students to create an outline and develop it into a complete essay. The students' writing performance was assessed using an analytic rubric adapted from Jacob et al. (1981), which covered five aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

Table 1. Rubric Scoring

Aspect	Score Range	Description
Content	13 – 30	Assesses knowledge, relevance, and depth of the topic.
Organization	7 – 20	Evaluates clarity, logical sequencing, and cohesion.
Vocabulary	7 – 20	Measures word choice, word form mastery, and appropriateness.
Language Use	5 – 25	Assesses grammar accuracy, sentence structure, and communication effectiveness.
Mechanics	2 – 5	Evaluates spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing.
Total	34 – 100	Overall writing quality score.

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through the pre-test and post-test results. Both tests were conducted in a controlled classroom environment, with 60 minutes allocated for each writing task.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed quantitatively. A normality test was first conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Since the data were normally distributed, a paired-samples t-test was applied to compare the pre-test and post-test scores. The analysis showed whether the outlining technique had a statistically significant impact on students' writing ability.

Results and Discussion

Based on the results of the writing tests conducted before and after the treatment, it was found that the writing skills of the seventh-grade students at SMPN 1 Pakel significantly improved after the application of the outlining technique. In the pre-test, the majority of students showed difficulties in organizing ideas, which resulted in poorly structured and unclear essays. After receiving the outlining treatment, students' writing performances improved substantially, as reflected in their post-test scores.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistical analysis shows that the mean score of the pre-test was 60.31, while the mean score of the post-test increased to 75.10. This increase indicates that the outlining technique contributed positively to the improvement of students' writing ability. The detailed descriptive statistics are as follows:

Tabel 2. Descriptive Statistics

Statistics	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Pre-Test	32	50	70	60.31	5.407
Post-Test	32	70	80	75.10	2.987

From the table above, it can be seen that the students' minimum post-test score (70) is already higher than the pre-test mean score (60.31), which strongly indicates an overall improvement.

Normality Test

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted to verify whether the data were normally distributed. The result is as follows:

Table 3. Normality Test

Test	Sig. Value
Pre-Test	0.200
Post-Test	0.200

Based on the SPSS output, both the pre-test and post-test have significance values greater than 0.05 (0.200), which means that the data are normally distributed. This justifies the use of the paired sample t-test for hypothesis testing (Ghasemi et al, 2012).

Paired Sample T-Test Result

The following are the results of the paired sample t-test obtained from SPSS:

Table 4. Paired Sample T-Test

Mean Difference	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
-14.781	-18.520	31	0.000

(Source: SPSS Output)

The mean difference between pre-test and post-test scores is -14.781, indicating a significant improvement in students' writing scores after treatment. The t-value (-18.520) is far from zero, showing a strong effect, and the significance value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This result confirms that the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores is statistically significant.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that the outlining technique has a significant and positive impact on the writing performance of seventh-grade students. The increase in students' average scores from 60.31 in the pre-test to 75.10 in the post-test clearly indicates that the outlining technique is effective in improving students' writing abilities. This finding supports the theory proposed by Harmer (2008:31), who emphasized that writing is a complex process that requires careful organization and planning (Handayani, 2022). The outlining technique provided students with a structured pre-writing phase that helped them organize their ideas systematically, which is crucial for producing coherent and logical essays.

This improvement also validates the stages of the writing process described by Negari (2011), which include prewriting, organizing, drafting, and polishing. Before using the outlining technique, most students struggled during the prewriting phase, as they were unsure how to develop and arrange their ideas. However, after receiving instruction on outlining, students were able to generate and organize their thoughts more efficiently during the prewriting stage, which positively influenced the quality of their final writing.

The results align with the theory of Batubara (2020), who stated that outlining enables students to logically arrange their main ideas and supporting details. In this study, students' post-test writing showed clear topic development, well-organized supporting sentences, and smooth transitions between ideas, which were lacking in their pre-test writing. The outlining process allowed them to build a solid writing structure, thus enhancing the cohesion and coherence of their essays.

Moreover, the findings are consistent with the benefits of outlining as presented by Lattimer (2023), who highlighted that outlining assists students in focusing on the main topic and in systematically elaborating their ideas. The post-test results showed that students no longer drifted away from the main topic, and their essays demonstrated improved focus and depth. This indicates that the outlining technique helped students remain aligned with the central theme throughout the writing process.

The improvement was not limited to essay organization but also extended to grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. According to Shekarabi (2017), outlining can reduce cognitive load, allowing students to pay closer attention to language accuracy. This theoretical perspective was

evident in the students' post-test results, where they made fewer grammatical errors and showed more precise vocabulary usage. With the essay structure already planned, students could allocate more mental resources to sentence construction and word choice.

Additionally, the learning process observed in this study supports the steps in creating an outline presented by Bisriyah (2022), which include selecting a topic, developing main ideas, and organizing supporting details. Students who consistently applied these steps were able to produce essays with clear introductions, well-developed body paragraphs, and effective conclusions. This structured writing approach was absent in their pre-test results, where essays often lacked direction and coherence.

These findings are also in line with previous research by Sari (2019), who concluded that outlining significantly improves students' ability to write narrative texts. Similarly, this study showed that outlining effectively enhanced students' writing organization across different text types. The results emphasize that the outlining technique is not only theoretically sound but also practically beneficial for improving students' writing performance in real classroom settings.

However, the process also revealed that some students initially encountered difficulties in applying the outlining technique. Some required additional explanation and practice before they could confidently create effective outlines. This observation is in line with the findings of Park et al., (2024), who noted that lower-performing students need more time and guidance to fully understand and apply outlining strategies. This suggests that teachers must provide sufficient scaffolding and regular feedback to help all students effectively benefit from this technique.

In conclusion, the integration of research findings and supporting theories indicates that the outlining technique is highly effective in improving students' writing skills. It enhances students' ability to organize ideas, focus on the topic, and improve grammatical accuracy, all of which contribute to the production of better-quality writing.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the use of the outlining technique has a significant positive effect on the writing skills of seventh-grade students at SMPN 1 Pakel. The statistical results showed that the students' mean score increased from 55.47 in the pre-test to 74.84 in the post-test, indicating an overall improvement of 19.37 points. The paired-sample t-test confirmed that this improvement was statistically significant with a significance value of $0.00 < 0.05$.

After the implementation of the outlining technique, students demonstrated better organization of ideas, improved coherence, and greater accuracy in grammar and vocabulary. The outlining technique not only helped students structure their essays logically but also supported them in focusing on the topic and reducing common writing errors. The improvements covered multiple writing components, including content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Overall, this study confirms that the outlining technique is an effective teaching strategy that can be applied to enhance students' writing abilities, particularly at the junior high school level.

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