

Exploring Self-Directed Learning Strategy to Enhance Students' Writing Ability: An Autonomous Learning Classroom Practice

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Abstract: This study seeks to explore the effectiveness of the Self-directed learning strategy to enhance students' writing ability. The study used a pre-experimental study with one group pretest and posttest design, which covered all eight classes of students at MTs. NW Mertak Nao as the population and samples. The instrument used descriptive text writing. The gained scores were analyzed statistically. The statistical analysis showed that the average score of pre-test was 28 and post-test score of the experimental group was 66.82, and the t-test was 4.1560, which was higher than the t-table value of 1.7247 at the significance level of 5% with the number of degrees of freedom was 54. The results of the study found that the Self-directed learning (SDL) strategy effectively enhanced students' descriptive text writing ability. The implementation of the SDL strategy has promoted students' awareness and self-control to a well-planned learning that successfully encouraged students to participate actively and express their ideas more independently during classroom learning of writing. Independence and responsibility for the learning reflected in the ability of the students to manage time, learning goals, and learning sources has empowered the Self-directed learning strategy to be the successful key in developing student-centered learning. Finally, this finding suggests that teachers should incorporate SDL principles in carrying out writing instruction to have students' better ability in writing.

Article History

Received: April, 2025

Revised: May, 2025

Published: June 25, 2025

Key Words

Self-Directed Learning Strategy; Autonomous learning; Effectiveness; Writing Ability.

How to Cite: Sari, A.P., & Permana, D. (2025). Exploring Self-Directed Learning Strategy to Enhance Students' Writing Ability: An Autonomous Learning Classroom Practice. *PAIDAGOGIA: Jurnal Inovasi Penelitian dan Pembelajaran*, 2(1). 1-12.

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Introduction

Writing becomes one of the important skills for junior high school students in learning English as a compulsory subject. Writing is defined as expressing ideas and thoughts using a group of words to form a short construction called a sentence and a longer one, so-called paragraph (Aryuntini et al., 2018). In the process of learning to write, students oftentimes find difficulties due to its critical functions to express written feelings and thoughts (Fauzan et al., 2022). These difficulties, as noted by (Syifa et al., 2022), lie in transferring the language which is not well mastered and getting stuck on the exploration of ideas due to having limited vocabulary. The students' poor concentration leads to producing mistakes in students' written works (Huy, 2015). On the other hand, in the context of learning as a foreign language, (Aghayani, Behnam; Janfeshan, 2020) claim that writing is considered to be the most difficult skill among other English skills for students to learn. As a result, students can not produce well-written thoughts in a piece of writing (Bulqiyah et al., 2021).

One of the writing subskills taught to the Junior high school students in their classroom learning is writing texts, one of which is writing descriptive texts (Daulay et.al, 2023) & (Nurfidoh et.al, 2023). Descriptive writing, according to (Huy, 2015), is a typical writing which describes a mental image including persons, places, events, or actions through visualization. However, the fact is that the writing of descriptive texts still raises difficulties for the students.

For instance, the writing of the descriptive text was not adjusted to the social function of the text, schematic structures, and even language features have made it difficult for students to produce such text (Noprianto, 2017). In addition, the inability of the students to use appropriate vocabulary, develop well-organized ideas, present comprehensive content, and show coherence in writing remains a real problem for students in writing (Roni, 2006).

Such difficulties seemed to happen to the students of MTs. NW Mertak Nao. Based on the result of a preliminary study by the researchers upon observing the students' descriptive writing ability, it was found that students still had difficulties in writing, which were reflected by the students' improper text construction based on descriptive writing principles. When asked to write a descriptive text on Senggigi Beach, most of the students could not appropriately describe the beach by using several words and phrases dealing with beach properties, such as the sun, sand, rocks, sellers, and even the tourists who visited the Senggigi beach. Here is enclosed one example of the text made by one of the students as the general picture of the students' initial text writing ability: *"Today I go to beach with my friend to senggigi beach. I look the water so clen and fresh so I go to swim with all my friend. We play there so long time after we bored we go to home"*. This simple text clearly showed that the text was not structurally written and well organized based on descriptive writing properties. The words used were still limited to such easy words, and not varied. The content of the text did not show an appropriate generic structure, representing an introduction and body of the descriptive text. Further, there had been an error in the spelling of the words, and the use of mechanics was well used.

In responding to this issue and to overcome such students' difficulties in writing, the use of learning strategies needs a space and ought to be applied as an alternative treatment for improving students' better writing performance. The use of a learning strategy helps learners support and manage their learning of the target language more effectively and efficiently (Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020). Yet, to make this learning strategy work effectively, teachers' roles are undeniably necessary to achieve qualified areas of learning, since teachers have the responsibility for their classroom instruction and to help students face difficult challenges and find alternative solutions within their learning (Altay, Ayse & Mirici, 2024). Next to that, the teacher's leadership is a very influential factor on students' classroom learning success (Langdon Warren, 2021). Therefore, one of the appropriate learning strategies that teachers utilize to help students to cope with difficulties in learning is Self-directed learning use as it applies to the present and future demand (Chukwunemerem, 2023).

Self-directed learning, known as SDL, is a learning process by which learners take charge and initiative over their learning, involving identifying needs of the learning, creating the learning plans, organizing the resources of the materials, selecting efficacious strategies of learning, and assessing their learning outcomes with or without assistance from others (Lai et al., 2022). Self-directed learning (SDL) highlights the role of autonomous learning within the language learning process (Rizal & Sulistyaningrum, 2022). This autonomous learning specifically characterizes the Self-directed learning activity as students take initiatives in the learning process activities (Lu, 2025). Self-Directed learning has at least three core importance; first, students can independently process knowledge transfer with no longer on teachers-centered dependence, second, learning and knowledge are not limited only to classroom search but anywhere, and the last is that learning is a lifelong process (Murniati et al., 2023). Through the use of self-direction, students enable themselves to take accountability by selecting the way they use information to create meaning personally (Brandt & Lorié, 2024).

Regarding the ways that Self-Directed Learning are organized in the classroom learning activities, according to (Brandt & Lorié, 2024), encompass some phases which are 1, planning in which teachers facilitate learners to identify learning needs on what and need to know, set up learning goals or targets based on learners' readiness and interests, and determine strategies for

completing the projects, 2 monitor and adjust, in this phase, teachers scaffold learners' learning by showing models by which they use to monitor their actions as they are engaged in accomplishing the tasks during the learning process, and utilizing feedbacks as sources of information to improve in achieving the goals, and 3, reflect and evaluate where teachers provide a chance for the learners in groups to present the results of their works including the feedbacks collected and processed, and then compare their works. The most important thing when share work takes place, teachers facilitate learners to reflect on what resources are the most useful and effective strategies supporting them to finish the tasks. Further, Huda (2013) notes several integrated stages including: 1). *Planning*, teachers begin the action involving analyzing student needs, curriculum issues, students' skill, designing learning objectives, selecting appropriate resources for learning, and making plans dealing with activities of the learning. 2). *Implementing*, teachers promote students' abilities based on previous plans and settings and provide opportunities for students to choose certain method according to their interest. 3). *Monitoring*, teachers conduct a monitoring on the students' work of the assigned tasks, as well as supervising students' awareness and sensitivity during the learning. 3). *Evaluating*, teachers at this stage try to assess, adjust, and compare students' results according to the goals previously designed, ask students to address statements, and ask questions regarding the process that has been completed to work on assignments.

There have been studies on the successful use of Self-directed Learning towards students' EFL learning achievements. A study by (Sriwichai et al., 2018) which examined a writing instructional model in combination of self-directed and blended learning, showing that self-directed and blended learning-based writing instruction had been able to promote students' writing performance. The further study by (Hafizah Adnan & Sayadi, 2021) exposed that students with a higher level of self-directness in self-directed learning had higher achievement scores compared to those having a low level of self-directedness. An improvement on the students' writing quality covering the aspects of coherence, content and ideas, and cohesion through a self-directed learning in a process-based writing program for EFL Learners was found (Aljasir, 2025). Another finding resulted from (Huda & Sulistyanningrum, 2022) showing that Self-Directed Learning had been able to improve students' reading ability as a result of students' learning awareness, responsibility, and autonomy increased. Meanwhile, (Rizkiani et al., 2023) found that there was a positive and significant association between students' academic writing achievements and the use of Self-Directed learning. In addition to this, a finding by (Mohammad Suleiman & Maniam, 2019) proved that the use of self-directed learning aided by movies successfully improved the students' speaking proficiency. These findings affirm the strong contributions of Self-Directed learning towards EFL students' achievements in learning.

Regarding the findings above, this current study aimed to explore the Self-Directed Learning strategy in an effort to enhance students' writing ability at MTS Mertak Nao. Studies on Self-directed learning, as previously stated, have been investigated in many different areas, including the field of writing (Olivier, 2019). However, a further study of Self-directed learning use on a more specified text type still needs to be comprehensively done. Thus, the novelty of the study lies in the use of Self-Directed learning-based strategies to promote students' writing acquisition in the context of descriptive text writing. It is expected that the findings can enlighten English teachers regarding effective strategies used to foster students' autonomous learning towards students' writing performance, particularly in writing descriptive texts.

Research Method

Research Design

This study applied a pre-experimental design by using a group experiment called *one-group pretest-posttest design*. Pre-experimental design was adopted to explore the influence of Self-directed learning strategy as the independent variable on students' writing with a specified

context of descriptive text writing as the dependent variable. Therefore, researchers need to interpret the results cautiously and consider alternative explanations for any observed effects. In this case, the present researchers investigated the difference between the pre-test and post-test results before and after giving treatment to study the effectiveness of Self-directed learning strategy toward students' writing.

Population and Samples

The population covers all students in the second grade of MTs. NW Mertak Nao, which consisted of one class with a total number of 30 students. In this research, the researchers took all the second-grade students as the sample. The researcher used a population sampling technique to determine the sample for the research.

Data Collection Techniques and Research Instrument

The instrument used in the research was a descriptive writing test. The descriptive writing test was used to find out whether or not the Self-directed learning strategy was effective in the teaching of descriptive text writing. The scoring criteria for assessing the students' writing involved Content (topic and details), Organization (identification and description), Grammar (present tense and agreement), Vocabulary, and Mechanics (spelling, punctuation, capitalization). The test was given at the beginning and the end of the treatment. Before the instrument was hired to collect data, it was first tried out to see the readability of the instrument using the Flesch-Kincaid readability text formula. Readability test was done to ensure that the instructions used in the instrument have met the minimum percentage score. Based on the readability test, the readability score reached 69%, which was categorized into the standard readability level and appropriate for educational level use of 13- to 15-year-old students, indicating that the instrument was valid for data collection. Data were collected through conducting the pre-test and post-test.

1. Pre-test

The pre-test was done as the initial action before the researchers conducted the teaching of writing through the self-directed learning Strategy in the classroom. The initial test gave students a writing topic on 'animals' to describe. It aimed at knowing the initial ability of students in writing the descriptive text.

2. Treatment

To ensure that the self-directed learning strategy gives a significant contribution towards the students' writing, treatment was conducted by teaching the students to write using Self-directed learning strategy, covering planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating. In the planning stage, students were engaged to form groups of learning, see, observe, and interpret pictures about the tourism places provided. In the implementing stage, students were asked to identify anything found in the pictures, and then, students were allowed to explore more relevant pictures of tourism places through various sources, including social media, the internet, and books. In the process of exploration, students used questioning, making a list, brainstorming, clustering, mapping, and outlining techniques. In the monitoring stage, students were engaged in developing descriptive texts based on the results of their exploration of tourism places. During the process of text development activity, students were monitored by the teachers to see the implementation of students' strategies and their writing progress. In the evaluation stage, students in groups were given chances to present their developed texts, and the teacher evaluated students' performances by giving comments and feedback.

3. Post-test

The post-test was administered to determine students' current ability in writing descriptive text after receiving the treatment by using Self-directed learning strategy. The

implementation of the posttest ensured whether or not improvement in scores happened to the students. The posttest was done by providing a writing topic on ‘school’.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data collected were subsequently analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive analysis was administered to present the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation scores. Meanwhile, inferential analysis was conducted through the t-test formula to examine and draw a conclusion about whether the hypothesis proposed was accepted or rejected.

Result and Discussion

The finding of the research seeks to present data obtained during the study in light of answering the research question proposed: “Is Self-Directed Learning Strategy effective towards students’ writing ability at MTs. NW. Mertak Nao?. To answer this question, the researcher based the findings on the students’ pre-test and post-test statistical analysis results. These data of pretest and posttest display mean scores, modes, median, standard deviation, sample variance, kurtosis, skewness, range, minimum, maximum, sum, and count to show clear descriptions of the experimented data. Details about the data descriptions of the two groups, the following are the students’ findings of experimental data for both pretest and posttest, completed with interpretations.

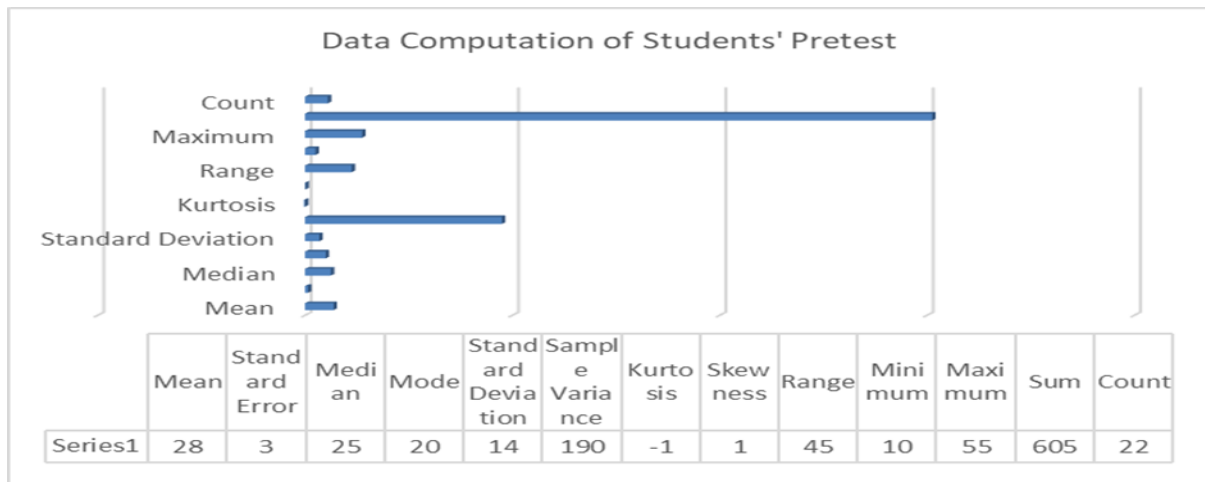


Figure 1. Data Computation of the Pre-Test Experimental Group

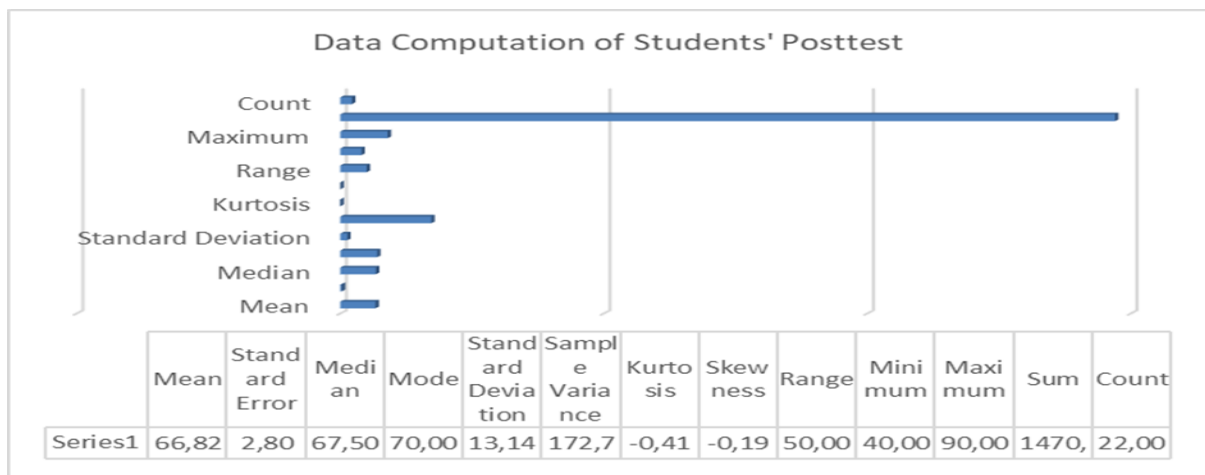


Figure 2. Data Computation of the Post-Test Experimental Group

The figure of pretest and posttest above showed that the mean score of the pre-test in the experimental group was 28. Meanwhile, the mean score of the post-test of the experimental group was 66.82. The mean score of the pre-test and post-test was obtained by dividing the sum of the pre-test and post-test scores by the number of students. The mode score of the pretest was 20, while the mode score of the posttest was 70. The median score of the pretest was 25 while the median score of the posttest was 67.50. The standard deviation of the pretest was 14, while the standard deviation of the posttest was 13.14.

As data on mean, median, mode, and standard deviation were tabulated, the computation of inferential statistics was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the self-directed learning strategy on students' performance in writing. The result of the inferential analysis was presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Comparison between the t-Test and t-Table

t-test	t-table	
	Df (n-1)	0.05
4.1560	22-1=21	1.72472

The t-test results indicated that the t-test value was 4.1560, compared to a t-table value of 1.72472 with a significance level of 0.05. Since the t-test value exceeded the t-table value; therefore, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) — stating that the Self-Directed Learning strategy is effective toward students' writing ability — was accepted, while the null hypothesis (H_o) — suggesting that the strategy is not effective toward students' writing ability — was rejected. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the self-directed learning strategy was effective in improving students' writing ability.

The finding above indicates that the implementation of the SDL strategy enhances students' writing of descriptive text, as demonstrated by a notable improvement from the pre-test to post-test scores. Specifically, the mean pre-test score for the experimental group in the beginning was 27.5, and after receiving SDL treatment, the mean post-test score improved to 66.8. Thus, it is clearly seen that the statistical analysis result strengthens that students' writing scores increased after implementing SDL. This finding has shown that the implementation of SDL can become an optional teaching strategy to maximize students' potential to foster their writing performance. By using the SDL strategy, students' writing ability has shown a significant improvement as a result of students' ability to demonstrate better descriptive text writing which has been constructed based on descriptive writing properties. In addition, students were able to develop the main ideas regarding the topics assigned and to make accurate inferences reflecting students' increased awareness and analytical sensitivity in their learning process of writing. Moreover, the SDL steps successfully encouraged students to participate actively and express their ideas more independently during classroom learning of writing.

The implementation of SDL strategy has pumped up students' motivation in learning to write independently which leads to boosting students' writing performance. This was based on what (Chau et al., 2021) stated, that SDL was an important pre-requisite which can be used to motivate students to learn. By promoting students' motivation, SDL has empowered students to manage their autonomous learning, which can heighten their interest and engagement in learning to write. Students' motivation drives a will to perform a higher level of learning in writing. The higher the motivation the better the writing ability is performed (Cahyono & Rahayu, 2020). In the other words, students' motivation and Self-Directed learning are importantly linked to learning in order to actualize learners' high learning performance (Bodkyn & Stevens, 2015).

These positive results on the effectiveness of SDL to treat students in learning to write within an EFL classroom are in line with several previous findings. Self-directed learning enhanced students' academic writing skills and students' independence in learning, as it helps students build up their high confidence to explore various resources for achieving successful learning (Ramadhani et al., 2020). The inclusion of Self-directed learning in working on sophisticated writing activities could help foster the students' writing ability (Mahamit, Pornpittaya; Sriwichai, 2023). A study on the use of Self-Directed learning by (Sarip & Sabarun, 2024) found a significant improvement in the students' argumentative academic writing as the students were engaged in the student-centered learning activities. In addition, the use of self-directed learning integrated with blended learning showed successful enhancement in students' writing performance (Sriwichai et al., 2018). Further, SDL had been able to promote students' writing quality assessed through several criteria representing coherence, content and ideas, and cohesion as the students were confronted with doing an independent learning followed by some reflections (Aljasir, 2025).

Such findings have established the important roles of self-directed learning in bringing positive contributions and significant improvements to the students' writing performance. Self-directed learning empowers students to take advantage of their potential as real professional writers and scientists to do an independent discovery and conduct a search on the assigned task, and at the same time, teachers play roles to guide students in the learning (Foxworthy et al., 2025). The effects of independence and deep learning engagement of SDL have significantly shaped students' learning outcomes (Schweder et al., 2025). However, autonomous learning is not merely featuring SDL; students' responsibility and monitoring process of their own learning has triggered them to have a good development towards the English writing proficiency (Aghayani, Behnam; Janfeshan, 2020). Thus, Self-directed learning strategy is undoubtedly able to manage the cognitive learning dimension through the learning autonomy and becomes one of the determining predictors toward students' success in language learning (Hawkins, 2018).

The significant contribution of Self-Directed learning strategies to promote students' independence of learning through implementing several integrated learning phases, which included planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating has been able to maximize students' efforts in pumping up students' learning performance. (KİMSESİZ, 2023) referring to Zimmerman (2000) emphasizes that strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluating effectively give better options for practicing the language skills in self-regulated learning settings. A well-planned process of learning, including setting the goals and determining the specified strategies, are essential for the success of learning. The implementing phase gives the students the chance to demonstrate the specific strategies in the attainment of the goals set. Self-monitoring plays an important role in seeing the progress and achievement during the learning takes a place and to ensure any efforts being passed through to carry out the assigned tasks, whether or not different strategies and additional time are needed in order to achieve to the goals effectively (Zhu et al., 2022); (Viberg et al., 2020). Meanwhile, evaluation helps the students assess their performance to accomplish the assigned task and make some reflections on the success and failure after a series of learning experimentation (Viberg et al., 2020).

The utilization of integrated strategies of Self-directed learning has advanced students' autonomy of learning, in which students have been able to manage their learning by taking initiatives and making effective decisions independently on their own learning through utilizing a certain chosen strategy (Ariyasinghe & Chandrasena Premawardhena, 2025). Demonstrating strategies which lead to autonomy of learning and promote metacognitive skills could improve students' ability in performing writing tasks, solving problems, and building spoken skills (Mujiono, 2024). Besides, the autonomous learning performed by the students is reflected in the ability to use self-management, that students have shown the ability to control

their learning by selecting the learning topics, setting the learning goals, and incorporating time management to accomplish the selected topics. Self-motivation, where students are motivated to make development in their learning and improve their whole learning experiences, and the last is students' self-monitoring which reflects students' awareness of providing feedbacks to observe advancement of their learning progress upon strategies applied (Slamet et al., 2025).

In summary, Self-directed learning strategy has not only enhanced students' motivation and engagement in the classroom learning of writing, but it has also effectively fostered a supportive learning environment where students can choose materials and strategies suited to their interests and manage their own learning during the learning process. In addition, Self-directed learning, through fostering students' autonomy of learning, can lead to more effective learning outcomes. Furthermore, Self-directed learning strategy successfully builds students' responsibility for their learning process, as the students can learn to control the time, set learning goals, and manage their learning resources. Self-directed learning strategy has developed students' independence in learning as they are assigned to be the learning manager for themselves to manage their learning with and or without any direct assistance from others. This learning independence can produce students' self-confidence and joy in learning, which supports the mastery of continuous learning outcomes. Thus, the success of the effective learning set can have a positive impact on the process of obtaining students' writing learning outcomes.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study sums up that that the Self-directed learning strategy effectively enhances students' writing ability. The enhancement is distinctively proven by the students' better descriptive text writing construction, which is based on descriptive writing properties and the different average scores achieved before and after receiving the treatment. The implementation of the SDL strategy has promoted students' awareness and self-control to a well-planned learning that has successfully encouraged students to participate actively and express their ideas more independently during classroom learning of writing. Independence and responsibility for the learning reflected in the ability of the students to manage time, learning goals, and learning sources has empowered the Self-directed learning strategy to be the successful key in developing student-centered learning. In other words, the implementation of the SDL strategy can become an optional teaching strategy to maximize students' potential to effectively foster students' writing performance in EFL learning. Finally, this finding suggests that teachers should incorporate SDL principles in their writing instruction to have students' better performance in writing.

Recommendation

This study was carried out within a limited scope of study and in very small setting regarding the effectiveness of SDL toward students' writing performance in producing a descriptive text through utilizing autonomous learning approaches of SDL strategy, which implied that this study only gave a common portrait on the efficacy of SDL strategy to cope with students' difficulties to write in EFL classroom learning. As a result, this finding was unable to fully generalize to the general case with complex study variables and wider research settings regarding the implementation of the SDL strategy. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers study more on the utilization of SDL in more critical perspectives with various research variables and scopes by using this current result as an optional reference for further research.

Acknowledgment

The researchers would like to thank the faculty of Culture, Management, and Business, especially the Department of English Language Education of Universitas Pendidikan

Mandalika, for having facilitated administrative issues regarding the research fluency and Mts. NW Mertak Nao for having given the researchers a valuable chance to conduct the research.

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