

## Conference Paper

# Choose a Corner Strategy and 21st Century Skills in Argumentative Writing

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**Abstract**

This classroom action research is aimed at evaluating Choose a Corner strategy in fostering students' higher order thinking skill in writing an Argumentative essay. As one of the sub-theme of the conference is the Four Cs (Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, and Creativity) in the teaching of language, literature, and arts; the researcher tried to see how the strategy of Choosing a Corner would lead students in incorporating those four Cs particularly in creating a piece of Argumentative essay. The subject of the study were the fourth semester of English Education Study Program at the Faculty of teacher Training and Education Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar. The result of the study showed that Choose a Corner Strategy helped the students in thinking critically, analysing the situation more deeply, and providing logical reason and write it in an Argumentative Essay. The improvement is taking place because they have the chance to collaboratively exchange ideas and thoughts in the same corner. Even a struggling students could finished a convincing argumentative essay. This proves that choose a corner strategy not only just a collaborative strategy, but when we could formulate problem in such a way, it is one of the best strategy to promote critical thinking.

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## 1. Introduction

Writing has always been a nightmare for college students, especially when they have to write argumentative writing. There are a lot of things that students need to master when it comes to write an argumentative writing. They need to prepare the ideas, supported with strong arguments, examples, reasons and evidences. The topic that they want to write should be well researched, coherently developed and adequately elaborated. Not to forget that they also have to pay attention on their grammar, punctuation, spelling, unity and coherence. This was the major problem faced by the fourth semester students of English Education Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Unmas Denpasar. They have still struggle in generating supporting ideas, elaborating the reasons and providing examples. Most of them waste their time in browsing ideas

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of what to write. The other lost in finding examples and supporting details but fail to maintain the focus of their writing. Therefore, most of their pre-writing time was spent inefficiently and resulted in a fuzzy draft.

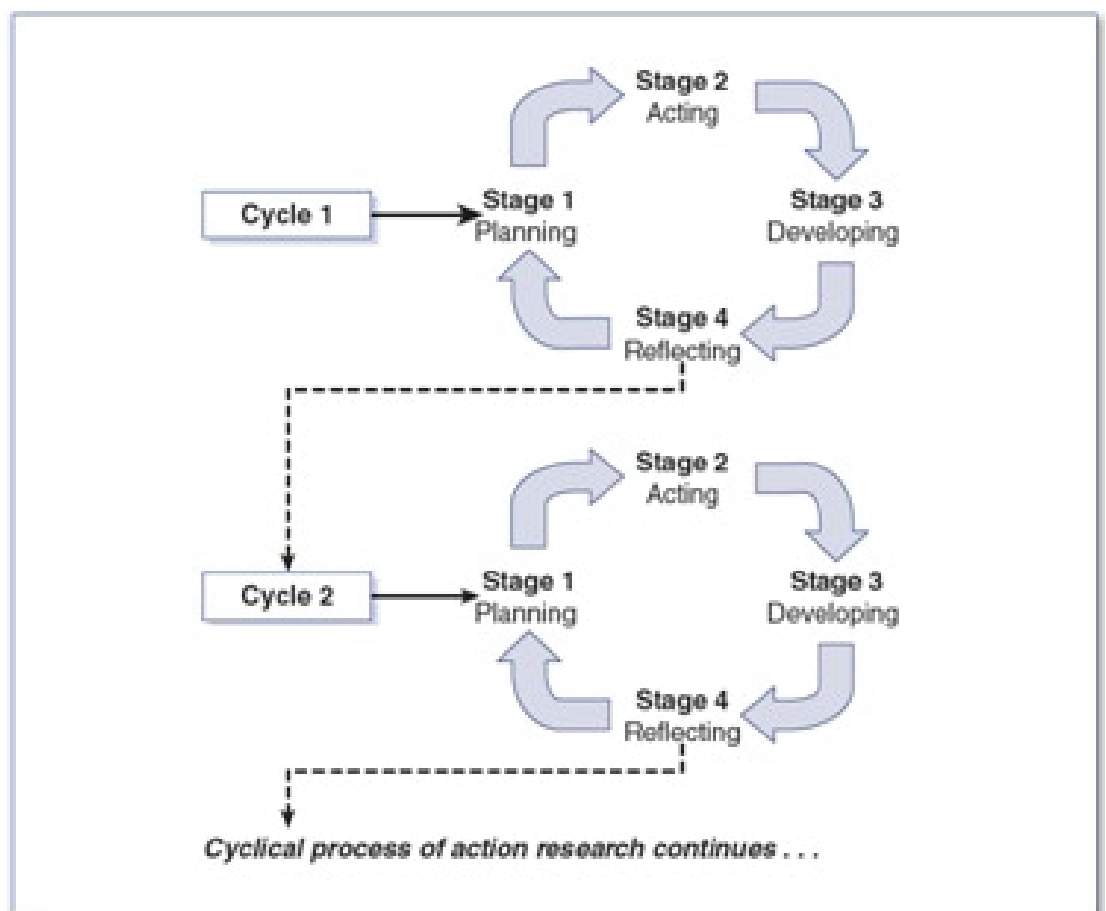
To get them more focus in the pre writing stage, the researcher tried to implement 'choose-a-corner strategy'. This choose a corner strategy promotes collaboration and discussion before they start writing or presenting their position (Tallman, 2014, Schulten, 2015). This strategy was considered as a cooperative learning strategies under the Kagan' corner strategy (Gradone, 2018). The strategy helps students in identifying and clarifying attitudes using hypothetical issues, considering others' point of view and ideas, and sharing reasons for making decision with others. The teacher could pose a problematic situation where the students have to make up their mind and take a stand. The students were expected to choose one of the four corners available. Each corner has been labelled before either with different topic or different level of statement like "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree" or "strongly disagree". Then after choosing the corner, they have to sit and discuss with other students who had chosen the same corner. In that corner they have to share the reasons why they choose that particular position. After they engender their ideas and reasons, they have to present it to the rest of the class. These steps of choose a corner strategy accommodate stages in the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

The desire for a better quality of life leads to what is so called the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. These skills are all a person need to be able to keep up in this fast evolving era. There are three major categories of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills according to Applied Educational System web, namely learning skills, Literacy skills, and Life skills. Specially for learning skills, it covers up to four paramount skills; critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication. This paper examines how choose a corner strategy in writing argumentative essay would facilitate the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

## 2. Method

This research applied a classroom action research which was carried out in two cycles. It was started with a pre-test to know the initial writing ability of the students by giving them time to free write an argumentative essay. Then the researcher stepped to the first cycle of the research where each cycle consists of four interconnected process namely planning, implementing, reflecting and evaluating. Planning is when the researcher plan the lesson with choose a corner strategy in it. Then followed by implementation where the strategy was actually implemented during the teaching and learning process. After

the implementation, a reflection is carried out to see what had gone right and what had gone wrong during the execution of the technique. The evaluation is done to keep the research on track, changing what needs to be changed, modifying what needs to be modified. This cycle goes on to the second cycle until the desired result is achieved. At the end of each cycle, post-test is distributed to monitor the progress of the students in writing argumentative essay. The figure below indicated the flow of cycles in classroom action research.



**Figure 1:** Cycles in Classroom Action Research.

To have a more comprehensive result, the researcher then administered a questionnaire at the end of session to see how the students feel and react toward the implementation of the strategy. The questionnaire was in a Likert scale identifying students to be strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree about the application of choose a corner strategy.

### 3. Finding and Discussion

There were two different data gathered in this research namely the writing achievement and questionnaire. This research was carried out in two different cycles, where each cycles ended up with a single post-test. The writing achievement data was resulted from the two post-tests and one pre-test. Meanwhile the questionnaire was quantified to see the overall response of the students toward choose a corner strategy. A more detail explanation of the finding could be seen as follow:

#### 3.1. Pre-test

In an attempt to find out their initial ability of writing argumentative essay, the students were given 90 minutes to draft and write their essay. They were allowed to make use all the resource available including using the search engine in their phone to find out topic idea, or supporting ideas. Before the pre-test taken place, the students have learned about the nature of argumentative writing, what it is, and how to create one. The major challenge in those 90 minutes was to generate the topic that they want and gather the supporting details they need. Most of the students seemed drowned in google to find the topic they interested in. some of them even tried to seek the short cut which was finding out the finished argumentative essay. However, since it was demanded that they write the draft first, a finish essay without a clear draft would not be accepted. The essay was expected to be written in at least five paragraphs following the generic structure of argumentative essay.

As a result, at the end of the 90 minutes students handed argumentative essays which were not well developed, some even unfinished. Some essays already had the idea but the elaboration of the argument was not strong. Some others able to develop a concise draft, but fail to write it into an essay. Therefore, a strategy need to be introduce to them to help them manage their argumentative essay.

#### 3.2. Post-test I

In post-test one, the researcher introduced choose a corner strategy as a pre-activity games where the researcher who also acted as teacher posted a problematic situations where the students have to choose a stand. While deciding which corner to choose they had to have the reason behind it. After they sit in the corner the chose, they have to discuss with the other friends who also chose the same corner. During the discussion they

were expected to come up with more than one reason why they choose that particular position or stand.

Referring to Teaching and Learning Strategies handbook, the implementation of choose a corner strategy will be as follow:

1. Prepare four signs, each numbered with a 1, 2, 3 or 4.
2. Place a number sign in each corner of the room.
3. Explain to students that they are to listen to four statements and choose the one that best represents their opinion. It may help students to become familiar with this strategy by starting with topics that require very little thought.
4. Students move to the corner that best describes their opinion.
5. Students standing/sitting together to share their reasons for choosing the statement.
6. Invite students to share opinions between corners then move onto a topic or issue that students may not have discussed

There was always a possibility that no students chose one particular corner. Thus, they need also to provide reasons of why not choosing that corner. The purpose of the discussion is to give chance to the students to listen others' point of view, different options, and various possibilities from a group with similar decision. After highlighting the major reasons of choosing their present corner, one representative of the group need to report it to the rest of the other groups.

After posting the problematic situations the students already knew how provide reasons upon the statement that they choose. They are at the same time practicing the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills where they have to think critically in figuring out the reasons behind their stands. They collaborate together sharing their ideas, reasons and point of views. They have to be creative in choosing which reasons they should put to represent their group. At the end they have to communicate the result of their discussion.

Cycle one was ended with post-test one. In the post test, the students were required to write an argumentative essay which were then scored according to analytical scoring rubric. They were also provided with four different topics to choose. They were then sit together with their peer with similar choice of topic. They may discuss until they have a robust idea, but they have to write the essay individually. The focus of the scoring would be on the development of their ideas, arguments' elaboration and the mechanics of the writing.

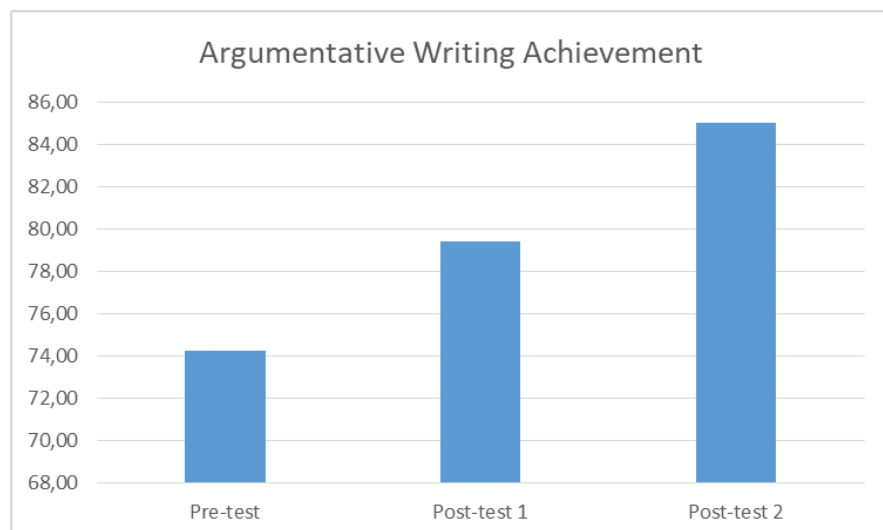
### 3.3. Post-test II

Cycle two was carried out under the point of reflection in cycle one. The choosing of the corner in the first cycle was upon a problematic situations. Meanwhile in cycle two the researcher posted a statement and labelled the corner into four different levels namely; 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree'.

The steps of doing choose a corner was similar to cycle one where after posting the statement, the students were asked to choose one corner and made a stand toward that statement. They need to have the logic reason behind their stand. When they gather together with the group on the same corner they exchange arguments, ideas and points of why they would agree on that particular position.

In this session also, the students practiced critical thinking when they have to think of the reasons why their position represents their thoughts. The students also trained themselves to be able to build communication with each other, not only to talk but also to listen to others' ideas and point of views. They learned to be creative and to work collaboratively within the group and decide which arguments would best represent their group. That was how they practice the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in choose a corner strategy.

At the end of cycle two, the researcher administered post-test II where once again the students were asked to write argumentative essay. The steps were still the same like previous cycles where they were provided with four different topics to choose. They need to develop a comprehensive essay to support their point of view of what they believe to be the topic of their essay. The essay were then checked and corrected using scoring rubric focusing on their development of their ideas.

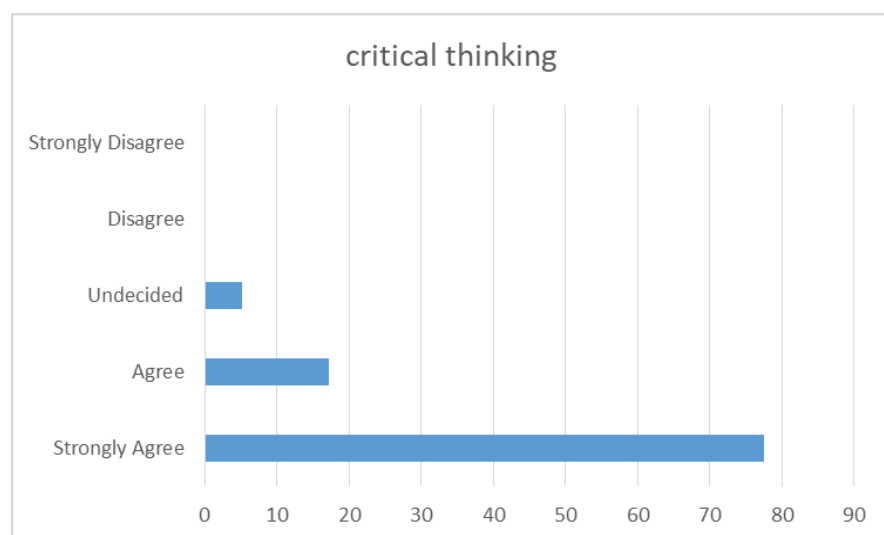


**Figure 2:** Mean scores for pre-test and post-tests.

From the above chart, it can be seen that in each phase the students experienced improvement in terms of their argumentative writing achievement. The total score of their writing in the pre-test was 4308 with the mean score of 74, 28. In post-test 1 the students' total score for argumentative writing was 4606 with the mean score of 79, 41. In the last cycle however, the students manage to achieve 4931 for the total score with mean score of 85.02.

### 3.4. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered to exactly found out how the students feel about the implementation of choose a corner strategy. The researcher would like to focus especially on the four skills that belong to the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. The questions highlighted whether the students feel that choose a corner strategy could really evoke their critical thinking, collaborative, communicative and creativity. The result of the questionnaire could be seen as follow.



**Figure 3:** Students' responses on question about critical thinking.

When the students were asked about whether or not choose a corner strategy help them think critically, around 77% students strongly agreed that it could help them boots their critical thinking. The students mostly agreed that the reasoning behind choosing a corner has made them think more thoroughly than before. When the question was about whether or not choose a corner strategy nurture creativity, around 64% students agreed and 23% chose strongly agree. In terms of collaboration, around 86% students felt that the strategy encouraged them to collaborate with others especially those in the

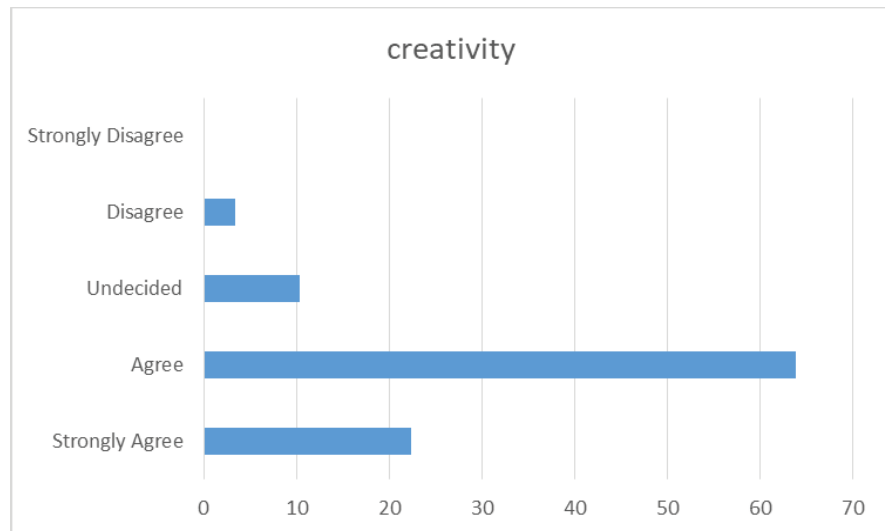


Figure 4: Students' responses on question about creativity.

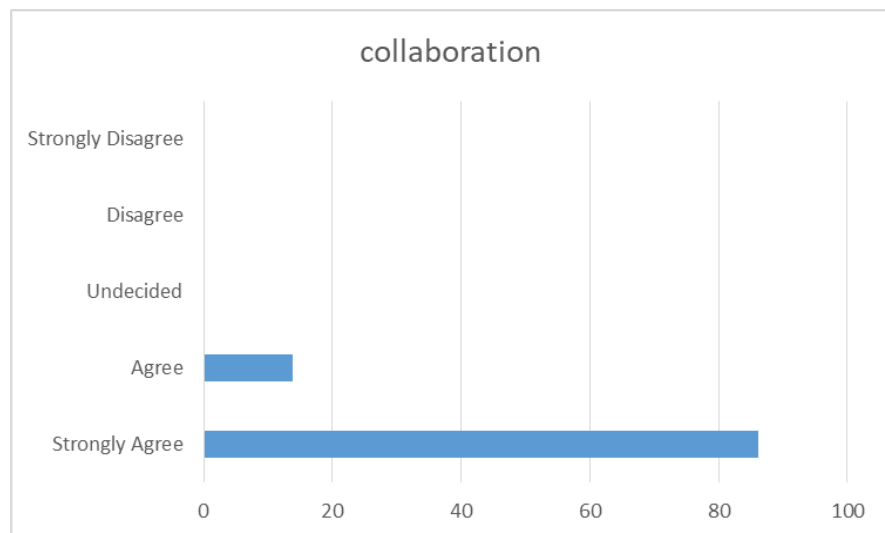


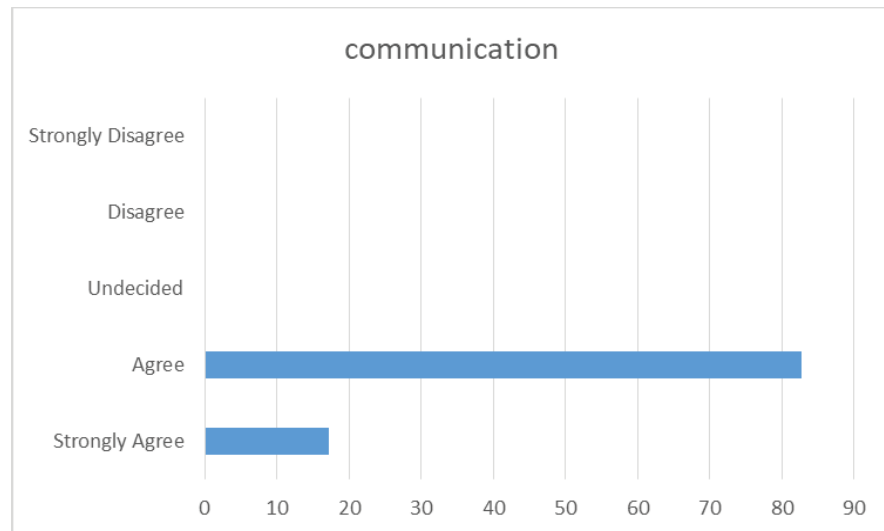
Figure 5: Students' responses on question about collaboration.

same corner. Meanwhile, 82% of the students agreed that the implementation of choose a corner strategy help them communicate better.

#### 4. Discussion

This classroom action research was done in two continuous cycles. Each cycle of choose a corner strategy has been implemented to help students write argumentative writing. At the beginning of the cycle the researcher provided problematic situation where the students have to choose a position that represent their own believes and feelings. The problematic situation was: suppose that you are a fire fighter and when there is a fire breakout you find out that there are four people inside the burning building. However,





**Figure 6:** Students' responses on question about communication.

you can only save one considering the time to take them to the save place and that the fire is getting bigger and bigger. The four people stuck in the fire are an old people, pregnant women, a child, and a blind man.

The choice of the four people to be saved become the label of the corners available. So the students were asked to choose one of the people to be saved and explain their reasons of choosing so. In this session, the four corners were occupied by different number of students. Unfortunately no students chose to save the blind man. They argued that saving blind mind would be too risky because it would be difficult to lead him or carry him out to the save place. They have their own reasons and arguments of why saving those particular people. Some students came up with the reason of effectiveness when they chose to save a child. They thought that child is way easier to be carried running to the save place. Some other argued that it would be better to save the pregnant women because two lives could be saved the mother and the baby in the womb. The other students believed that the older people should be rescued first because of the moral that everybody need to respect the elderly.

Through the discussion, the students could share their own reasons and perspective and how they end up with that decision. During the discussion students also listen attentively to their fellow group members to figure out the best reason to support their position. They not only expected to listen attentively but they should also have the courage to speak up and utter their own point of view within the group. Moreover, at the end of the discussion they need to sum up their arguments and present it in front of the class.

The students seemed enjoy their discussion with their peer who chose the same corner. They make use of their thinking time to really ask themselves which corner they would like to choose and sit on. Dyck (2013) argues that the implementation of choose a corner strategy also promotes creative thinking. They could evaluate and think critically upon a situation or statement.

In regard to communication and collaboration, choose a corner strategy nurture these skills through group discussion. Students listen to their friends when they are expressing their point of view. They also learned how to speak up their mind to their peers. They collaborate together to decide the strongest arguments to represent their position.

The only reason why they could achieve better in their argumentative writing is because they train their critical reasoning skill back during the implementation of choose a corner strategy. They are getting used to practice their creativity in providing arguments to support their position. The students learn communicative and listening skill when they have to exchange thoughts and comment on their friends' arguments.

Schulten (2015) states that the implementation of choose a corner strategy as a pre writing activity could boost the students' confidence. She further believes that this particular strategy also suits kinaesthetic learners as they are asked to move around to the corner they chose. When they already brainstorm the ideas in group they could then proceed to further investigation when necessary and write it as a report or an essay.

Furthermore, students personally feel that through choose a corner strategy they could brew better ideas and arguments for their writing. From the questionnaire result it could be seen that most of the students agree that the implementation of choose a corner strategy could help them exercise all the aspects in the 21<sup>st</sup> skills. The brainpop website states the same thing that Four Corners is an interactive learning strategy that promotes listening, verbal communication, cooperation, critical thinking, and decision-making. Moreover, it can be used at any level.

The findings of this research also supported by fellow teacher and researcher who had implemented the Kagan's structure including choose a corner strategy, Gradone (2018), who also found out that the strategy made her students more comfortable with their peers and teacher. Moreover, the implementation of this strategy could improve students' communication and make learning more interesting.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestion

General conclusion could be drawn from this research that choose a corner strategy could improve students' argumentative writing achievement. Furthermore, the steps in

choose a corner strategy could nurture the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills particularly the creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. The increasing mean score from pre-test to post-test 1 and post-test 2 indicates that there were improvement in students' writing achievement. This finding were further supported by the result of the questionnaire where most of the students responds positively toward the implementation of choose a corner strategy. The questions were emphasized more on the four skills of creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. Therefore it is highly recommended for teacher to implement choose corner strategy in different level and across skills. It could be inform of debate, reading and reasoning, or problem solving skill.

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