

## Strengthening Students' Narrative Writing Skills through the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) Using the ABCD Approach at MA Al Ihsan Beji

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### Abstract

*This community service program aimed to improve the narrative writing skills of eleventh-grade students at MA Al-Ihsan Beji through the application of the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach and the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). The program consisted of seven learning sessions, with three sessions specifically focused on narrative text enhancement, including the introduction of narrative structure and language features, deepening conceptual understanding, and guided independent writing practice. The program utilized students' existing assets, particularly their basic grammar foundation from the AEDS program, and further developed their skills through structured and collaborative activities. The findings indicate that students demonstrated improved accuracy in using past tense forms, action verbs, and temporal conjunctions, as well as better organization of narrative sequences. Furthermore, GTM supported students in systematically translating ideas from Indonesian into English. Overall, the program successfully strengthened students' writing ability, although additional reinforcement is still needed in developing descriptive vocabulary and creative narrative expression.*

### Abstrak

Program pengabdian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan menulis teks naratif siswa kelas XI MA Al-Ihsan Beji melalui pendekatan Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) dan penerapan Grammar Translation Method (GTM). Sebanyak tujuh pertemuan pembelajaran dilaksanakan, dengan fokus utama pada tiga sesi penguatan teks naratif, yang mencakup pengenalan struktur dan unsur kebahasaan, pendalaman konsep dan jenis teks naratif, serta praktik menulis secara mandiri. Program ini memanfaatkan aset yang sudah dimiliki siswa, yaitu dasar tata bahasa dari program AEDS, kemudian dikembangkan melalui latihan terstruktur dan kolaboratif. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan bahwa siswa mampu menerapkan pola kalimat masa lampau, kata kerja aksi, dan konjungsi waktu dengan lebih tepat, serta menunjukkan peningkatan dalam kemampuan mengorganisasi cerita secara runtut. Selain itu, penggunaan GTM membantu siswa menerjemahkan ide dari bahasa Indonesia ke bahasa Inggris secara sistematis. Dengan demikian, program ini berhasil memberdayakan kemampuan menulis siswa secara lebih terarah, meskipun masih diperlukan penguatan dalam pengembangan kosakata deskriptif dan ekspresi naratif kreatif.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English has now become an international language that plays an important role in various fields of life, ranging from education, technology, and economy to intercultural communication. Almost all global sources of information, whether in the form of books, journals, or digital media, use English as the primary language. Therefore, mastering English has become an essential skill for students in order to compete in the era of globalization (Rao, 2019).

In the context of education in Indonesia, English has been taught from the elementary level up to higher education. This shows that the government places English as one of the strategic subjects that must be mastered by students. Through English learning, students are expected to develop language skills that include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These four skills complement one another; however, in practice, writing is often considered the most challenging

skill because it requires mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and the ability to organize ideas coherently (Sukmawati et al., 2023).

One of the major challenges faced by Indonesian students in learning English lies in their limited mastery of grammar and writing skills. Although grammar has been explicitly taught in the classroom, students often struggle to recall and apply grammatical rules accurately when they are asked to produce longer texts. For instance, they may be able to identify the past tense of verbs in exercises, yet fail to use them consistently in narrative writing. This indicates that there is a gap between students' declarative knowledge of grammar and their ability to apply it in communicative tasks (Adam et al., 2021).

Writing, in particular, becomes a demanding skill because it requires not only linguistic accuracy but also the ability to generate, organize, and connect ideas into coherent texts. Many Indonesian learners face difficulties in structuring sentences, choosing appropriate vocabulary, and maintaining cohesion through conjunctions and transitions. As a result, their written work often shows frequent grammatical errors and lacks the clarity needed to effectively communicate ideas. These persistent challenges highlight the need for teaching approaches that can reinforce grammar while simultaneously guiding students in producing more accurate and structured writing (Hidayati, 2018).

Within the Indonesian curriculum, narrative text holds a significant place as one of the major genres taught at the senior high school level. Narrative texts are not only designed to entertain readers but also to encourage students to develop creativity in storytelling. In order to write an effective narrative, students must follow the generic structure those are orientation, complication, and resolution, and apply specific language features such as the past tense, action verbs, time conjunctions, and pronouns. These requirements make narrative writing an important yet demanding exercise for learners (Batubara, 2013).

Despite its importance, many students continue to struggle with writing narrative texts. One of the main difficulties lies in grammar, particularly the consistent use of the past tense and the correct application of to be in past forms. In addition, students often face challenges in arranging their stories according to the expected structure, which results in texts that are incomplete or lack coherence. Another recurring problem is the use of conjunctions to link ideas and events smoothly. Without mastery of these elements, students' narratives often contain fragmented ideas and frequent grammatical errors that affect the overall quality of their writing.

These challenges suggest that while students may already possess some theoretical knowledge of grammar and text structure, they still require reinforcement and practical opportunities to apply this knowledge in meaningful contexts. Thus, effective teaching strategies are necessary to help students overcome their difficulties and to strengthen their ability to produce well-structured narrative texts (Wilianty & Amaniarsih, 2024).

Narrative text is a type of writing that primarily aims to entertain or inform readers by presenting a series of events or experiences in a structured manner. According to an Indonesian study, narrative texts typically consist of three primary stages: "orientation," "complication," and "resolution," which guide students in organizing characters, settings, conflicts, and conclusions (Amelya et al., 2022). On a broader level, narratives are understood as cohesive and coherent stories with clear beginnings, middles, and ends – a structure that allows readers to follow the unfolding of events chronologically and causally (Lu et al., 2016). Because narrative writing invites students to engage their imagination and sequence events meaningfully, it becomes an ideal genre for applying learned grammatical structures in a writing context.

Beyond structural organization, narrative texts exhibit distinctive language features that support storytelling and help convey meaning effectively. For example, narratives frequently employ the simple past tense to situate events in a past timeline (i.e., "She walked into the forest"), use action verbs to depict dynamic actions, and deploy time connectives such as "then," "after that," and "finally" to guide event progression (Anderson & Anderson, 2003). In the Indonesian EFL context specifically, research has found that students often struggle with these language features in narrative writing, citing missing time markers, misused verb forms, and weak transitions as frequent error types (Qatrinada & Apoko, 2024). These features underline that narrative writing demands not only logical structure but also linguistic accuracy and effective lexical choices.

The relevance of narrative text in teaching writing becomes evident when it is viewed as a vehicle for applying grammar and vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Because narrative texts require students to recall and sequence events, translate ideas from their first language into English, and choose correct verb forms and connectors, they align with instructional strategies that emphasize guided practice, translation, and explicit grammar focus. In the community service context at MA Al Ihsan Beji, narrative writing offers a platform where students can strengthen their grammar knowledge – especially past tenses and verb forms – while

simultaneously developing their vocabulary and writing fluency. By integrating narrative text as the core writing genre, the program seeks to transform passive grammar knowledge into active language production.

At MA Al Ihsan Beji, students receive additional support in language learning through the Arabic and English Development System (AEDS) program, which provides foundational knowledge in grammar such as the use of tenses and sentence structures. This foundation represents a significant asset for language development. However, while students are familiar with these grammatical concepts, they have not yet been given structured opportunities to apply them in extended writing tasks, particularly in the form of narrative text. As a result, their grammar knowledge tends to remain at the level of recognition rather than active use.

In this community service program, writing activities are introduced not merely as a new skill, but as a strategy to strengthen and apply the grammar knowledge students already possess. Narrative text is selected because it naturally encourages the use of past tense, irregular verbs, time conjunctions, and sequence of events, allowing students to practice grammar in a meaningful and contextualized way. Through guided writing steps, students are supported in recalling vocabulary, arranging sentence patterns, and gradually constructing narrative paragraphs (Madu, 2024).

Using the ABCD (Asset-Based Community Development) approach (García, 2020), this program focuses on developing the strengths that students already have, such as their foundational grammar knowledge, enthusiasm for learning, and the supportive learning environment at MA Al Ihsan Beji. Rather than emphasizing errors, the program encourages students to build confidence, practice collaboratively, and gradually transition from guided to more independent writing. This approach is expected to create a sustainable reinforcement model that benefits both students and teachers in future learning activities.

The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) has long been recognized as one of the traditional approaches in teaching foreign languages, particularly when the focus is on grammatical accuracy and translation skills. This method emphasizes the use of learners' first language (L1) as a medium to explain grammar rules and to translate sentences from L1 into the target language. By doing so, GTM allows students to recall and reinforce grammar knowledge that they have already learned, making it highly relevant to contexts where grammar has been taught but not yet fully mastered in practice (Benati, 2018a).

In reinforcing students' grammar through narrative writing at MA Al Ihsan Beji, GTM becomes a suitable option because students already possess a basic understanding of English grammar from the AEDS program. However, they often struggle to apply these rules when writing narrative texts, particularly due to their limited vocabulary and difficulty in using irregular verbs. Through GTM, teachers can bridge this gap by guiding students to recall grammar structures in their first language, then gradually practice constructing sentences and texts in English with more confidence.

The method also supports a step-by-step learning process that fits the needs of these students. For example, teachers can begin by reviewing the past tense in Bahasa Indonesia and encouraging students to translate sentences into English, focusing on correct verb forms and sentence structures. After this recall activity, students may collaborate in building a narrative text together, with the teacher providing guidance on vocabulary and grammar. Finally, students are given the opportunity to apply what they have learned in an independent writing task, which helps reinforce both their grammatical knowledge and vocabulary use (Rosi, 2024).

By integrating GTM and narrative writing in this program, the community service activity seeks not only to enhance students' grammar mastery but also to promote their confidence and autonomy in writing. Students' engagement in storytelling and translation tasks allows them to transform their grammatical awareness into meaningful written output. Moreover, the use of narrative writing aligns with emerging research suggesting creative writing tasks can significantly improve EFL students' writing proficiency and motivation (Yulia, 2013).

Therefore, this program responds directly to the needs of MA Al Ihsan Beji by leveraging existing assets and providing contextualized writing practice. The writing intervention through narrative text using GTM and the ABCD approach offers a structured, supportive, and sustainable pathway for students to develop their writing competence. This forms the basis for the community service initiative described in the following sections.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This community service program was conducted using the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, which emphasizes identifying and strengthening existing assets rather than focusing on problems or deficiencies. The ABCD model views learners not as

recipients of aid, but as individuals who already possess valuable skills, experiences, and motivations that can be developed to enhance learning outcomes (García, 2020). This approach was chosen because the students at MA Al Ihsan Beji had previously received foundational grammar instruction through the Arabic and English Development System (AEDS) program, yet had not been given structured opportunities to apply their grammar knowledge in extended writing tasks.

a. Location and Participants

The program was implemented at MA Al Ihsan Beji, involving 17 students who participated in the AEDS program. These students already understood several basic grammar concepts, including tenses and sentence structure, which served as a human asset for the program. The school environment, supportive teachers, and availability of learning facilities also strengthened the implementation process.

b. Assets Identified

The identification of assets was carried out in the initial stage and categorized according to the ABCD framework:

Table 1. Asset Identification

Asset Type	Description
Human Assets	Students' prior grammar knowledge, teacher collaboration, peer learning habits
Social Assets	Supportive classroom atmosphere, willingness to collaborate, active participation
Physical Assets	Classroom space, whiteboard, worksheets, dictionaries
Institutional Assets	AEDS program structure, school literacy initiatives

c. Program Structure

This community service activity was carried out in seven meetings, each designed to build students' language skills through structured and progressive learning steps. Although the program included sessions on speaking and debate, the main focus of this community service was on improving students' narrative writing skills, which were specifically strengthened through Meeting 1, Meeting 2, and Meeting 6. These three meetings emphasized understanding the structure and language features of narrative text and applying them in a guided writing process using the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). Meanwhile, the other four meetings supported students' oral communication confidence and classroom interaction.

In delivering the sessions, the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach was applied to reinforce the strengths students already possessed, such as basic grammar knowledge learned from the AEDS program, their interest in English learning, and collaborative classroom dynamics. Each meeting integrated explanation, practice, collaboration, and reflection, ensuring that students not only received new input but also applied it directly in meaningful contexts.



Figure 1. Deepening Narrative Text

Meeting 1 - Introduction to Narrative Text: Structure, Past Tense, and Conjunctions (2 September 2025). The first session introduced the concept of narrative text by discussing its generic structure (orientation, complication, resolution) and language features including the simple past tense, action verbs, and time conjunctions. The tutor provided several short narrative examples and guided the students in identifying the structural components and verb use in those

texts. Students were encouraged to ask questions and relate the material to stories they were already familiar with.

Following the explanation, students participated in a guided worksheet activity in which they underlined past tense verbs, listed conjunctions, and labeled the sections of a sample narrative. This activity helped shift grammar knowledge from recognition to structured application, making Meeting 1 the foundational session for narrative writing development in the later meeting.

Meeting 2 - Deepening Understanding of Narrative Text: Types and Collaborative Analysis (3 September 2025). The second meeting deepened the students' understanding of narrative texts by examining different narrative genres such as fables, legends, and personal experiences. The academic definition of narrative text was introduced, emphasizing its communicative purpose: to entertain and to present a series of events in a logical sequence. Students discussed how narrative texts rely on storytelling elements such as characters, setting, conflict, and resolution.

After the discussion, students worked in small groups analyzing a narrative text assigned to their group. They highlighted the structural components and identified past tense verbs and time-related sentence connectors. The collaborative approach allowed students to negotiate meaning and support one another in identifying grammar features in authentic text.

Meeting 3 - Introducing Debate through Asking and Giving Opinions (9 September 2025). This session shifted the focus to speaking skills by introducing expressions for asking and giving opinions. Students learned key phrases, practiced pronunciation, and observed sample conversation models. The tutor demonstrated how expressions could be used in everyday discussions.



**Figure 2.** *Preparing Debate*

Students were then divided into pairs to perform short simulated conversations. This activity encouraged oral fluency and built confidence in expressing personal views in English. Although this meeting was not part of the narrative writing focus, it contributed to developing communicative interaction among students.

Meeting 4 - Preparing for Debate: Structuring Arguments and Rebuttals (10 September 2025). Meeting 4 introduced the concept of argument structure, including claims, supporting reasons, and rebuttals. Students learned to differentiate between strong and weak arguments, and how to respond politely when disagreeing.

After receiving the explanation, students began preparing short arguments on given topics. The tutor guided students step-by-step to ensure clarity and coherence in expressing ideas. This strengthened logical thinking skills that later supported the organization of narrative writing as well.

Meeting 5 - Debate Performance: Expressing Opinions through Real Communication (16 September 2025). The fifth session provided the opportunity for students to perform short debates. Students were grouped into teams and took turns presenting their opinions, defending their standpoint, and responding to opposing arguments. The activity created an interactive and lively classroom atmosphere.

This meeting helped students build communication confidence and fluency in English. Although not directly related to narrative writing, the self-confidence developed here was observed to support clearer expression when producing narrative texts in Meeting 6.

Meeting 6 - Writing Practice: Developing Narrative Texts through Creative Expression (23 September 2025). This session was the main implementation stage for narrative writing. Students were guided to create their own narrative texts while recalling vocabulary, applying past tense

verbs, and arranging events logically. Some students first drafted their ideas in Indonesian and then translated them into English with tutor support, reflecting the application of GTM.

The tutor provided feedback on grammar and story flow during the writing process. As a result, students demonstrated improvement in verb consistency, sentence patterns, and event sequence. This session directly addressed the primary program objective: strengthening grammar mastery through practical narrative writing.

Meeting 7 – Closing Session: Reflection and Appreciation (24 September 2025). The final session included reflection activities where students shared their experiences, challenges, and progress. Recognition and appreciation were given to active participants to encourage continued learning motivation.

This session emphasized collaborative learning and encouraged students to continue practicing narrative writing and spoken English beyond the program.

d. Instructional Approach (GTM Integration)

The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was used to guide the writing activities because students already possessed conceptual knowledge of grammar but experienced difficulties in applying it during writing. GTM allowed students to translate ideas from Indonesian to English step-by-step while receiving structured grammatical guidance (Benati, 2018b). The instructional process included:

1. Grammar Recall and Explanation Using L1: Students reviewed the simple past tense and irregular verbs with explanations provided in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure conceptual clarity.
2. Guided Translation Practice: Students translated short narrative sentences from Indonesian to English, focusing on correct verb forms and syntax.
3. Collaborative Paragraph Construction: Students worked in pairs or groups to build narrative sequences using conjunctions and time markers.
4. Independent Narrative Writing: Students wrote a complete short narrative text individually while the instructor provided vocabulary and structure support.

This staged approach enabled students to gradually transition from guided practice to independent application.

e. Data Collection Techniques

Even though this was a community service program, documentation and learning evaluation were conducted through:

Table 2. Data Collection Techniques

Instrument	Purpose
Observation	To record student engagement, participation, and learning attitudes
Worksheets	To assess individual progress in narrative writing
Field Notes	To support reflective evaluation of implementation outcomes

### 3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Before the English learning empowerment program was carried out, discussions with teachers and classroom observations revealed that the eleventh-grade students of MA Al-Ihsan Beji already possessed certain linguistic strengths. Most students demonstrated a basic understanding of English grammar, especially simple past tense and the use of regular and irregular verbs. This foundation was largely formed through their previous learning experiences in both English and Arabic subjects, as the AEDS program had accustomed students to recognizing grammatical forms and sentence patterns across languages.

However, despite their grammatical familiarity, many students expressed challenges in producing English sentences independently due to limited vocabulary and lack of confidence in writing. They frequently relied on translation and teacher guidance, which indicated that their primary strength was *structural knowledge*, while their main challenge lay in *lexical development and language fluency*. Therefore, their strengths became the principal *assets* on which the program was built, aligning with the ABCD principle that empowerment begins with recognizing what the learners *already have*, not what they *lack* (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

**Dream: Establishing the Learning Purpose**

Based on the identified strengths and challenges, the expected learning goal was to enable students to write narrative texts independently and with confidence. Narrative text was selected as the core focus of three sessions since it encourages students to express ideas creatively while still relying on familiar grammatical structures. In addition, narrative writing provides a meaningful context for vocabulary development and descriptive detail, allowing students to expand their expressive ability in English.

Through collaborative planning with teachers, the learning outcomes aimed to ensure that students were able to:

1. Recognize and apply the structure of narrative text (orientation, complication, resolution).
2. Use past tense verbs and conjunctions accurately in narrative sequencing.
3. Expand vocabulary through guided translation and contextual sentence-building.
4. Produce a complete narrative text consisting of at least ten sentences.

This phase reflects the *Dream* stage of the ABCD model, where the community – in this case, students and teachers – collectively envision improvement based on their existing strengths (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

**Design: Implementation of the Narrative Text Sessions**

The empowerment program included seven total English sessions, but the focus of this service activity was on the **three meetings dedicated to narrative text**, carried out as follows:

**Table 3.** Implementation of Narrative Text Session

Meeting	Date	Focus	Learning Activities
1	September 2, 2025	Introduction to Narrative Text	Explaining structure, past tense, conjunctions; guided sentence building
2	September 3, 2025	Deepening Narrative Understanding	Identifying types of narratives, text analysis, collaborative learning
6	September 23, 2025	Writing Practice	Students develop and write their own narrative texts

**Destiny/Deliver: Outcomes and Reflection**

The results of the narrative writing activity show overall positive outcomes. Students demonstrated strong understanding in organizing narrative structure and applying grammatical rules. The following table presents the students’ writing performance as part of the empowerment program:

**Table 4.** Students' Writing Performance

Student	Score	Category
13	96	Excellent
7	95	Excellent
2	93	Excellent
11	93	Excellent
4	91	Excellent
15	91	Excellent
9	90	Excellent
1	88	Excellent
17	87	Excellent
8	86	Excellent
5	83	Good
12	83	Good
3	82	Good
6	81	Good
16	81	Good
14	80	Good
10	78	Good

These results indicate that the majority of students were able to produce narrative texts effectively, demonstrating both structural coherence and appropriate grammatical control. The learning process also fostered increased confidence, as observed by students’ decreasing reliance on teacher assistance throughout the sessions.

However, reflections during group feedback sessions revealed areas for continued improvement. Students expressed the need for broader vocabulary exposure and more opportunities to practice descriptive language and dialogue writing – areas which align with findings in similar learning contexts (Anderson & Anderson, 2003).

Thus, the program demonstrates that GTM is effective for strengthening grammatical and structural accuracy, but future activities should incorporate more communicative and expressive practice, such as dialogue role-play, vocabulary games, and storytelling.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The English learning empowerment program focused on enhancing students' narrative writing skills through the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) demonstrated positive outcomes, as students were able to apply narrative structure and grammatical rules effectively while increasing their confidence in expressing ideas through writing. The ABCD approach helped maximize students' existing strengths in grammar awareness and guided the development of vocabulary and narrative expression through structured learning sessions. However, the findings also indicate the need for continued support in expanding descriptive vocabulary and practicing more communicative forms of language use. Therefore, it is recommended that future community service programs integrate GTM with more interactive activities such as storytelling, role-play, and vocabulary enrichment games to build both accuracy and fluency, ensuring a more balanced and holistic language learning experience for students.

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