.

The Use of Mystery Envelope Game in Learning to Write Simple Mandarin Sentences among Twelfth Grade Students at SMA Insan Cendekia Syech Yusuf Gowa

Nurmiati
nhrmiati@gmail.com
Universitas Negeri Makasar

Misnah Mannahali
Misnah_mannahali@gmail.com
Universitas Negeri Makasar

Nur Nasharuddin Noni
nur.nasharuddin.noni@gmail.com
Universitas Negeri Makasar

Abstract: *This study investigates the implementation of the Mystery Envelope game as an interactive method to enhance Mandarin sentence-writing skills among twelfth-grade students at Insan Cendekia Syech Yusuf Senior High School, Indonesia. Students commonly face difficulties in constructing grammatically correct and coherent Mandarin sentences, despite strong memorization abilities, especially those from Islamic boarding school backgrounds. This research uses Classroom Action Research (CAR) across two cycles, applying both qualitative and quantitative methods, including observation sheets, field notes, and pre- and post-tests. The Mystery Envelope game involved students forming sentences from randomly selected Mandarin words contained in envelopes, encouraging critical thinking and grammar application in a fun, student-centered environment. Results revealed a significant improvement in writing ability: the average score increased from 86,5 in Cycle I to 87,6 in Cycle II. Students demonstrated better understanding of sentence structure, vocabulary usage, and confidence in writing. The study concludes that the Mystery Envelope game is an effective, engaging instructional strategy for improving Mandarin writing skills, particularly in constructing simple sentences. It also enhances student motivation, participation, and language mastery through active learning techniques.*

Keywords: *Mystery Envelope Game, Writing Skill, Simple Mandarin Sentences*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential tool for communication and plays a central role in human interaction. Through language, individuals express emotions, ideas, thoughts, and intentions, while also establishing social and cultural identities. Writing, in particular, is a complex language skill that requires not only vocabulary knowledge but also an understanding of grammatical structure, logic, and coherence. Among the four fundamental language skills listening (听力 Tīnglì), speaking (口语 Kǒuyǔ), reading (阅读 Yuèdú), and writing (写作 Xiězuò) writing is often considered the most challenging, especially for foreign language learners.

Mandarin Chinese is a globally significant language with complex characteristics such as tonal pronunciation, logographic characters (Hanzi), and syntactic structures that differ greatly from alphabetic languages like English or Bahasa Indonesia. As a result, many students learning Mandarin, particularly at the high school level, struggle with writing grammatically correct and meaningful sentences. One of the major obstacles is students' difficulty in applying vocabulary within syntactically correct and semantically coherent sentence structures.

To overcome these challenges, language instructors must apply creative and student-centered teaching methods that engage learners actively. One such method is the use of educational games, particularly the "Mystery Envelope" game. This interactive learning approach requires students to construct simple Mandarin sentences using random vocabulary provided inside envelopes. It emphasizes

collaborative learning, critical thinking, and practical application of writing skills in a fun, low-pressure environment.

Writing in Mandarin is particularly complex due to its unique linguistic characteristics. According to Zhang (2020), the writing process in Chinese requires a strong grasp of character composition, stroke order, and contextual word usage, which makes sentence formation especially difficult for non-native learners. In Indonesian schools, where Mandarin is often introduced as a third or foreign language, students encounter additional obstacles such as limited exposure and lack of real-life application. Consequently, writing becomes the most underdeveloped skill among the four core competencies. Addressing this gap is vital, as writing not only reflects language mastery but also enhances overall cognitive and grammatical awareness. Therefore, the implementation of innovative instructional strategies, such as game-based learning, becomes increasingly essential in motivating students and reinforcing their ability to produce accurate Mandarin sentences.

This study emerged from the observation of students at Insan Cendekia Syech Yusuf Gowa Senior High School (translated from SMA Insan Cendekia Syech Yusuf Gowa), a secondary school located in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The school integrates Mandarin language education into its curriculum under the Merdeka Curriculum framework. Interviews with a Mandarin teacher at the school revealed that twelfth-grade students face notable difficulties in mastering sentence writing, often falling short of the minimum competency score (KKM) of 78. Despite possessing strong memory skills especially those from *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) backgrounds or students who have memorized the Quran they struggle with applying vocabulary into coherent Mandarin sentences.

This indicates a gap between vocabulary memorization and syntactic application. Student's limited grammatical understanding, coupled with low engagement due to monotonous teaching techniques, contributes to their writing challenges. As such, the need for engaging, interactive, and contextually relevant teaching methods becomes evident.

The "Mystery Envelope" game offers a potential solution. In this method, students receive envelopes containing randomly arranged Mandarin words or phrases. Working individually or in groups, they are tasked with rearranging the contents into correct, simple sentences. The task not only reinforces grammatical structure but also cultivates teamwork, motivation, and an enjoyable classroom atmosphere.

Each envelope typically contains several cards, each printed with a single Mandarin word or short phrase. These may include subjects (e.g., 我 wǒ – I), verbs (e.g., 是 shì – is/are), objects (e.g., 老师 lǎoshī – teacher), time expressions (e.g., 今天 jīntiān – today), and place descriptions (e.g., 在家 zàijiā – at home). The vocabulary items are selected based on the learning objectives of the lesson and are designed to enable students to form grammatically correct and meaningful simple sentences. Some envelopes may also include punctuation marks or sentence patterns, depending on the level of the learners. For example, an envelope might contain the words: "我", "爸爸", "是", and "老师", which students would rearrange into "我爸爸是老师" (My father is a teacher).

This hands-on activity enables learners to interact directly with the language components, fostering deeper understanding through tactile and visual engagement. It also helps students internalize sentence structures and promotes active participation. Teachers act as facilitators by guiding the students through the game and providing feedback on their sentence construction.

The method has been positively reviewed in prior studies and shown to be effective in various educational contexts. For instance, Fadillah and Subandi (2023) found that the Mystery Envelope method significantly improved students' abilities to construct simple Mandarin sentences, with a success rate of 90% during the first two sessions. Similarly, Mustika, Rahajeng, and Hariani (2017) showed that this method enhanced narrative writing among fourth grade students at Cerme Lor Public Elementary School, Gresik, evidenced by improved average post-test scores. Another study by Zhafira, Rahmawati, and Ardani (2023) indicated that a similar approach using "windowed envelopes" in language classes enhanced collaboration, discipline, and enthusiasm among seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Barat (translated as Barat 2 Public Junior High School).

Despite these benefits, challenges remain. Some students become overly reliant on their peers in group settings, leading to unequal participation. Others are more focused on the game aspect than the educational goals. Additionally, the preparation for such games can be time-consuming for teachers and require significant classroom management skills.

Nevertheless, the potential advantages outweigh these drawbacks. The Mystery Envelope game cultivates creativity, fosters confidence, and allows students to learn through discovery. It transforms the traditional classroom into a dynamic learning space where language production is encouraged through play and experimentation.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how the implementation of the Mystery Envelope game can improve Mandarin sentence-writing skills among twelfth-grade students at Insan Cendekia Syech Yusuf Gowa Senior High School. By utilizing Classroom Action Research (CAR) over two learning cycles, the research will examine lesson planning, teaching execution, and learning outcomes. It will assess how this method affects students' sentence composition abilities, their engagement in learning, and their overall performance in writing tasks.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the pedagogical discourse on teaching Mandarin as a foreign language and provides practical insights for educators seeking to enhance writing skills through innovative methods. It also aims to address the theoretical and practical gaps in language instruction by highlighting how interactive, game-based strategies can bridge the divide between rote vocabulary learning and functional language use.

Through the findings of this study, teachers, schools, and educational stakeholders can gain valuable knowledge on how to foster a more interactive, effective, and enjoyable learning environment for Mandarin writing instruction. The study not only supports the development of students' linguistic abilities but also aligns with broader educational goals of fostering active learning, critical thinking, and language mastery in secondary education settings.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs Classroom Action Research (CAR) as its primary method, which is a reflective process of progressive problem-solving carried out by teachers or researchers in educational settings. The goal of this research is to identify and solve learning problems encountered in the classroom, specifically in the context of Mandarin language learning among twelfth-grade students at Insan Cendekia Syech Yusuf Gowa Senior High School.

CAR is chosen because it allows the researcher to directly engage with the classroom dynamics and observe the immediate effects of the teaching method applied

in this case, the Mystery Envelope game. This method follows the model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart, which includes four main stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. These stages are implemented in cycles, allowing improvements and adjustments in each cycle based on the previous outcomes.

2.1 Research Design
The study is designed in two cycles, with each cycle consisting of four stages:
1. Planning: The researcher prepares lesson plans, teaching materials, evaluation tools, and classroom management strategies. During this stage, the Mystery Envelope game is customized to suit the students' language level, focusing on vocabulary and sentence patterns aligned with the curriculum.
2. Acting: The planned lesson is executed in the classroom. The students participate in the Mystery Envelope game where they receive envelopes containing various Mandarin words and are asked to arrange them into correct and meaningful sentences.
3. Observing: Observations are made regarding student participation, engagement, collaboration, and their ability to construct simple Mandarin sentences. Tools such as observation sheets, teacher journals, and video recordings are used to document student behavior and classroom interactions.
4. Reflecting: The researcher evaluates the effectiveness of the cycle by comparing pre- and post-test results, analyzing student feedback, and identifying challenges or improvements needed. Based on this reflection, modifications are made for the next cycle.

2.2 Participants
The participants of this study are students from Grade XII of Insan Cendekia Syech Yusuf Gowa Senior High School, South Sulawesi. The class was selected based on their previous performance in Mandarin writing, which showed that many students struggled to form simple sentences correctly.

This population was chosen because it represents a group that is underperforming in Mandarin writing yet possesses high memorization ability, making them an ideal target for testing the impact of interactive learning methods like the Mystery Envelope game. Moreover, these students are preparing for graduation and final assessments, so improving their language skills is urgent and relevant.

2.3 Instruments of the Study
Several instruments are used to collect data:
- Pre-test and Post-test: To measure the students' ability to write simple Mandarin sentences before and after implementing the Mystery Envelope game.
- Observation Sheets: Used by the researcher and a collaborator to observe student behavior and classroom atmosphere.
- Field Notes: The researcher keeps detailed notes on student responses, challenges, and teaching reflections.
- Documentation: Photographs and videos are taken to record activities during the lesson implementation.

2.4 Data Collection
Data is collected throughout each stage of the two action research cycles. During planning and acting, teaching materials and lesson plans are documented. During the

acting and observing stages, direct observations, field notes, and test results are gathered. All data is recorded systematically and stored securely for analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative methods are used to analyze the collected data.

- Quantitative Analysis: Pre-test and post-test scores are analyzed to determine the improvement in students' writing ability. Descriptive statistics such as mean, percentage, and gain score are used to evaluate progress.
- Qualitative Analysis: Observation notes, student responses, and reflections are examined to understand the effectiveness of the teaching method in enhancing student motivation, participation, and understanding of Mandarin syntax.

2.6 Current Conditions and Urgency

The current condition of Mandarin language education, particularly in Indonesian high schools, reflects several challenges:

- Mandarin is often considered difficult due to its logographic script and tonal pronunciation.
- Students frequently rely on memorization rather than practical application.
- Writing is often neglected in favor of listening and speaking skills.
- Teachers tend to use conventional teaching strategies that fail to engage students.

In this context, the Mystery Envelope game serves as an innovative and urgently needed intervention. The game shifts learning from passive to active, encourages collaboration, and allows students to apply vocabulary in context. Given the low writing scores and student disinterest, this method is a timely response to a real educational need.

2.7 Uniqueness of the Study

This research presents several unique contributions:

- It integrates an interactive game-based method into Mandarin writing instruction, which is rarely done in Indonesian contexts.
- It focuses on students from Islamic boarding school backgrounds who have strong memorization skills but low grammatical application, providing insight into how specific learner characteristics can affect method effectiveness.
- The study adapts the Mystery Envelope game to a foreign language context, whereas it has mostly been used in general or local language teaching.
- It uses action research to provide ongoing feedback and refinement of teaching methods, creating a practical model for Mandarin teachers across Indonesia.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

All participants are informed of the study objectives, and parental consent is obtained for student involvement. Student anonymity is preserved, and data is used solely for academic purposes. The researcher ensures that all activities conducted in the classroom are aligned with school policies and national education standards.

2.9 Conclusion of Method Section

This research method is designed to ensure rigorous, systematic inquiry into the effects of the Mystery Envelope game on students' Mandarin writing skills. By combining planning, implementation, observation, and reflection, and by involving real

classroom participants, the study not only tests a hypothesis but also contributes to practical teaching strategies. The uniqueness and urgency of the study lie in its context, its target learners, and its game-based instructional innovation. The Classroom Action Research framework makes it possible to directly link student performance with teaching methods, thereby offering immediate solutions to pedagogical challenges in Mandarin language education.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and analyzes the results obtained during the two cycles of Classroom Action Research, which aimed to improve students' ability to write simple Mandarin sentences through the implementation of the Mystery Envelope game. It also explores factors contributing to the improvement, including classroom management and student engagement, and connects them to the effectiveness of this interactive method.

3.1 Cycle I Results

At the beginning of the study, students were given a pre-test to evaluate their initial ability to write simple sentences in Mandarin. The results showed that most students were only able to translate words but struggled to organize them into correct syntactic structures. Common errors included misplacement of subjects and predicates, incorrect use of measure words, and missing linking verbs such as 是 (shì).

After implementing the Mystery Envelope game in the first cycle, students were asked to rearrange sentence components from the envelopes into correct sentences. They completed the task individually to ensure the outcome reflected their personal understanding, without relying on help from peers. Each envelope contained words such as 我 (wǒ), 是 (shì), 学生 (xuéshēng), and 今天 (jīntiān), from which they could form sentences like "我今天是学生" (Today, I am a student).

The average score of students in improving their ability to write simple Mandarin sentences was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Average Score} = \frac{\Sigma Total\ Student\ Scores}{Number\ of\ Students}$$

$$\text{Average Score} = \frac{545}{21}$$

Average Score = 25,95

After knowing the average student score, the next step is to find the percentage using the following equation:

$$\% = \frac{Average\ Score}{maximum\ score} x100\%$$

$$\% = \frac{25,95}{30} x100\%$$

% = 86,5%

Next, the number of class intervals was determined using the following formula:

K = 1 + (3,33) log n

= 1 + (3,33) log 21

= 1 + (3,33) 1,32

= 1+ 4,39

= 5,39 rounded to 5

R = (Highest Score – Lowest Score) / Number of Intervals

= 100 -70

= 30

$= \dfrac{30}{5}$

= 6

Table 1. Student Writing Score Distributing (Cycle I)

No	Interval	Frequency	%	Category
1.	87-100	13	61,9	Very Good
2.	76-86	7	33,3	Good
3.	60-75	1	4,7	Average
4.	55-59	0	0	Bad
5.	≤ 54	0	0	Very Bad
Total		21	100.00	

The post-test results of Cycle I showed significant improvement, with the class average reaching 82,5. This score reflects that students began to understand word order in Mandarin, improved their grammar application, and developed better confidence in sentence construction. However, there were still issues in tone application and independent construction, especially among students who were less confident working alone.
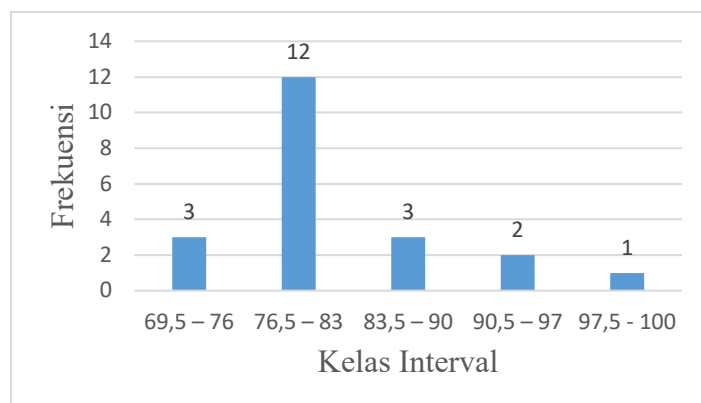

Figure 1. Histogram of Writing Skills of Grade IX Students of SMA Insan Cendekia Syech Yusuf Cycle II

3.2 Cycle II Results

Improvements were made in the second cycle by enhancing teacher guidance and reinforcing the use of individual work to assess each student's progress more accurately. The envelope contents were also adjusted to include more varied vocabulary, including time, place, and object markers. For example, students worked with phrases such as 在学校 (zài xuéxiào – at school), 写作 (xiězuò – writing), and 他们的老师 (tāmen de lǎoshī – their teacher).

The average score of students in improving their ability to write simple Mandarin sentences was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Average Score} = \frac{\Sigma Total\ Student\ Scores}{Number\ of\ Students}$$

$$\text{Average Score} = \frac{552}{21}$$

Average Score = 26,28

After knowing the average student score, the next step is to find the percentage using the following equation:

$$\% = \frac{Average\ Scor}{maximum\ score}\ x\ 100\%$$

$$\% = \frac{26,28}{30}\ x\ 100\%$$

% = 87,6%

Next, the number of class intervals was determined using the following formula:

K = 1 + (3,33) log n

  = 1 + (3,33) log 21

  = 1 + (3,33) 1,32

  = 1+ 4,39

  = 5,39 rounded to 5

R = (Highest Score – Lowest Score) / Number of Intervals

  = 100 -73

= 27

$$= \frac{27}{5}$$

= 5,4 rounded to 5

Table 2. Student Writing Score Distributing (Cycle II)

No	Interval	Frequency	%	Category
1.	87 - 100	16	76,19	Very Good
2.	75 - 86	4	19,04	Good
3.	60 - 75	1	4,76	Average
4.	55 - 59	0	0	Bad
5.	≤ 54	0	0	Very Bad
Total		21	100.00	

The results of the post-test in Cycle II showed a further increase, with the class average reaching 87,3. The improvement is attributed to more effective classroom management, individualized assessment, and clearer instructions. Students showed improved fluency and were able to form sentences such as "他们在学校写作" (They write at school) and "我的爸爸是老师" (My father is a teacher).

These outcomes also align with prior findings by Mustika et al. (2017), who reported that game-based learning increased classroom enthusiasm and reduced language anxiety. In the present study, students displayed greater autonomy and responsibility when working independently with the envelopes. The increase in post-test scores demonstrates that the Mystery Envelope game supports scaffolding allowing students to build on existing vocabulary knowledge while gradually internalizing grammatical rules through repetition and contextual use. Teachers observed that even students who were initially passive began to participate actively, asking questions and attempting to form sentences confidently. This shift in behavior highlights the psychological impact of game-based learning, which lowers affective filters and encourages risk-taking in language production. Furthermore, this method promotes differentiated instruction, as students with varying language proficiency levels can engage with the material at their own pace.
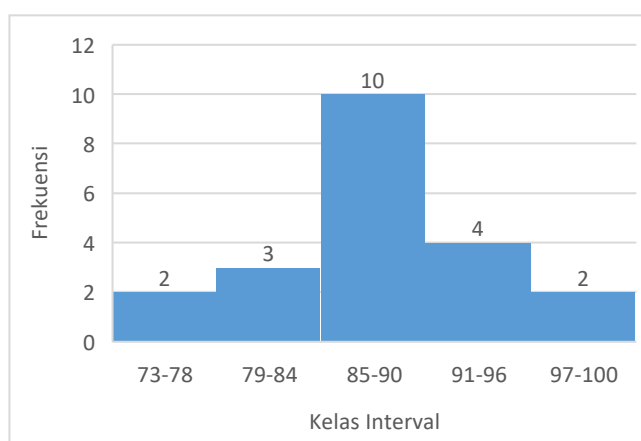

Figure 2. Histogram of Writing Skills of Grade IX Students of SMA Insan Cendekia Syech Yusuf Cycle II

To further illustrate the impact of the Mystery Envelope game, below are examples of students' simple sentence writing before and after the implementation of the game.

Before using the Mystery Envelope game:

Students often wrote fragmented or grammatically incorrect sentences, such as:

- "老师我学生。" (Teacher I student)
- "他早上吃。" (He morning eat)

- *"是我学校。"* (Is I school)

These examples show that students had difficulty with word order and lacked understanding of Mandarin sentence structure, especially subject-verb-object placement.

After using the Mystery Envelope game:

Students showed notable improvement in constructing complete and grammatically correct sentences, such as:

- *"我是学生。"* (I am a student)
- *"他早上吃早饭。"* (He eats breakfast in the morning)
- *"我在学校学习。"* (I study at school)

These examples demonstrate that the Mystery Envelope game helped students understand sentence structure, use vocabulary appropriately, and construct logical ideas in written Mandarin.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to address the problem of low writing skills in composing simple Mandarin sentences among twelfth-grade students at Insan Cendekia Syech Yusuf Senior High School. The core research question was: *"How can the Mystery Envelope game improve students' ability to write simple Mandarin sentences?"* The findings from two action research cycles provided a clear and positive answer to this question.

The implementation of the Mystery Envelope game proved to be an effective solution to enhance students' sentence-writing skills. In Cycle I, students achieved an average score of 86.5, indicating a significant improvement from their initial abilities. By Cycle II, their average increased to 87.3, supported by stronger classroom management and improved individual engagement. The game's structure encouraged students to independently construct sentences based on vocabulary components provided in the envelopes. This method stimulated their understanding of Mandarin syntax, word order, and sentence patterns.

Furthermore, the students' motivation and confidence increased due to the interactive and playful nature of the activity. The game also supported key curriculum themes (主题 *zhǔtí*) such as 家庭 (*jiātíng* – family), 学校生活 (*xuéxiào shēnghuó* – school life), and 我的一天 (*wǒ de yì tiān* – my daily routine), making the lessons contextually relevant and engaging.

In conclusion, the Mystery Envelope game not only provided a practical and enjoyable approach to Mandarin learning, but also significantly improved students' writing skills, particularly in forming simple, grammatically correct sentences. It also enhanced individual accountability through independent tasks, classroom discipline through effective management, and student enthusiasm through interactive methods. The game thus addresses the original research problem effectively, proving itself a valuable pedagogical tool in Mandarin language instruction.

REFERENCES

Abbas, S. (2006). *Pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia yang Efektif di Sekolah Dasar* (pp. 32–35). Depdiknas.

Arsyad, A. (2005). *Media Pembelajaran*. Raja Grafindo Persada.

Fadillah, A. N., & Subandi, S. (2023). Penggunaan permainan amplop misteri sebagai alternatif pembelajaran menyusun kalimat sederhana bahasa Mandarin pada

peserta didik kelas XI IBB SMA Al-Islam Krian. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Mandarin*, 1(1), 94–106.

Gie, T. L. (2002). *Terampil Mengarang* (p. 40). Balai Pustaka.

Mustika, R., Rahajeng, D., & Hariani. (2017). Efektivitas penggunaan media amplop misteri dalam pembelajaran keterampilan menulis narasi siswa kelas IV SDN Cerme Lor Gresik. *Penelitian Pendidikan Guru*, 5(3), 6.

Musfiqon. (2012). *Pengembangan Media dan Sumber Pembelajaran* (pp. 65–70). Prestasi Pustaka.

Semi, M., & Atar. (1993). *Menulis Efektif* (p. 117). Angkasa Raya.

Sudono, A. (2000). *Sumber Belajar dan Alat Permainan* (p. 70). Grasindo.

Zainurrahman. (2011). *Dari Teori Hingga Praktek (Penawaran Racun Plagiarisme)* (pp. 98–100). Alfabeta.

Zhafira, N. Z., Rahmawati, R., & Ardani, D. A. (2023). Penerapan Media Pembelajaran Amplop Berjendela Dan Description Paper Pada Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Indonesia Materi Deskripsi Objek Siswa Kelas VII SMPN 2 Barat. In *Seminar Nasional Sosial, Sains, Pendidikan, Humaniora (SENASSDRA)*, 2(1), 142–148.