

EXPLORING STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES AND CAUSES IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXT: AN ANALYSIS IN AN INDONESIAN HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

Descriptive writing requires the ability to create mental images for the reader. This research aimed to analyze the students' difficulties and causes in writing descriptive text. It applied a descriptive qualitative research design. The subjects of the research are a class of students in a senior high school in Palopo, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The data were collected through documentation, interview, and observation. Based on the results of this study, three general difficulties were found for students in writing descriptive text, including 1) difficult to follow the generic structure of descriptive text; 2) difficult to use the linguistic features, and 3) misuse of writing mechanics. These difficulties are caused by several factors, including 1) the students are less in writing practice, 2) lack of writing ideas, 3) lack of vocabulary mastery, 4) lack of motivation in learning English. The difficulties in writing descriptive text highlight the need for a more comprehensive and integrated approach to classroom instruction in English. A balanced combination of grammar, vocabulary, and writing abilities should be taught throughout the curriculum, with an emphasis on real-world applications and situations.

Keywords: *Analysis, Students' Difficulties, Writing, Descriptive text*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a process that determines and organizes students' ideas and puts them on paper and then reshapes and reviews (Baker, 2016; Sulistyono et al., 2019). Students can convey their ideas in their mind by organizing them into a good text, so that the others know them and they can think critically (Siburian, 2013). Mastering vocabulary and tenses become the main key to get good writing (Ximenes et al., 2019). The writers have to choose appropriate vocabularies and arrange words to be a 'voice' with which to write, planning, goal-setting, monitoring and evaluating what is going to be written as well

as what has been written and searching for language with which to express exact meaning (Harris & Graham, 2018). Through writing, it can inform others or communicate with others, tell the information, persuade, tell what's on our mind, etc (Durga & Rao, 2018).

However, writing or learning to write is not easy to do, because it is one of four basic skills that are very complex and difficult to learn (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Ismayanti & Kholiq, 2020). It becomes the most difficult skill when it is learned by the foreign language learners (Farooq & Uzair-ul-hassan, 2012) because writers must be able write it in multiple issues such as organization, content, purpose, vocabularies, audience, and mechanics such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization (Collins et al., 2007; H Douglas Brown, 2004). It is because there are some aspects that the students should learn to make good writing. Those aspects are grammar, vocabulary and mechanics (Sulistyo et al., 2019). They have to understand those criteria well in order to produce good writing. In the teaching and learning process of writing, the teachers have an important role (Durga & Rao, 2018; Toba et al., 2019). To make writing sessions engaging, educators employ a variety of teaching tools, such as blogs (Hartina et al., 2023), canva (Hadi et al., 2021), telegram bots, and other cutting-edge IT-based materials (Selvarasu, 2010).

Writing difficulties are caused by a number of factors. Byrne cited in Duha (2022) (Duha, 2022) identified three categories of issues that make writing difficult. These are cognitive, linguistic, and psychological difficulties. In psychological difficulties, writing is essentially an independent activity which forces the writer to work alone with no opportunity for interaction or feedback. As in psychological difficulties, writing presents students with low motivation and confidence since they believe they lack writing experience (Syahrir & Hartina, 2022). Also, the students' perception of writing as a difficult activity. Linguistic difficulties in writing descriptive text include the aspect regarding grammatical items and vocabulary mastery. In cognitive problems, writing is learned through a process of education in cognitive issues (Derakhshan & Shirejini, 2020). Writers must master the written form of the language and understand specific patterns that are crucial for efficient communication in writing but are only occasionally or never utilized in speech (Alisha et al., 2019)

One of the text types taught in senior high school is descriptive text. A descriptive text is one that provides details on a specific thing. It allows readers to visualize a person, place, or thing through the use of sensory details. It can be individuals, animals, places, or things (Noprianto, 2017). Writing descriptive has two generic structures: Identification (it serves to introduce to the reader about the object that we will explain, before describe about the object

in more detail in the next paragraph) and description (it contains the inherent characteristics of something that you have introduced to the reader in the first paragraph); it has its own linguistic features: using simple present tense, action verbs, adjectives, relating verbs, etc. (Husna, n.d.; Ismayanti & Kholiq, 2020). It means students must understand the generic structure and language aspects of descriptive text in writing descriptive. This can help students develop their imaginative skills and improve their ability to create mental images (Noprianto, 2017). It helps students develop their language skills by encouraging them to use a variety of vocabulary and sentence structures (Situmorang & Manurung, 2020). It also helps them understand the importance of word choice and sentence structure in conveying meaning effectively. By practicing descriptive writing, students can improve their overall writing skills and become more confident and effective communicators. In order to write descriptive texts effectively, students must comprehend the language conventions and general structure of descriptive texts.

Numerous writing challenges that high school students encounter can have a negative impact on the quality and efficacy of their work. One of the most prevalent writing challenges is using incorrect grammar. Grammar mistakes by high school students can include misusing commas, mismatching conjunctions, poor subject-verb agreement, and pronoun-antecedent mishaps (Syahrir & Hartina, 2022). Delays in clarity can also confuse readers and negatively impact the work's overall impact. In order to achieve simplicity and clarity, students should organize their ideas, formulate a clear thesis statement, stay away from jargon, and use simple language (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Furthermore, using the wrong punctuation might be a major error (Derakhshan & Shirejini, 2020). In order to communicate structure and meaning in writing, proper punctuation is crucial. It can be difficult for high school students to use punctuation marks correctly.

According to Harris & Graham (Harris & Graham, 2018), students difficulties in writing can be caused by certain factors. Mostly, lack of proficiency in the text production skills that are common errors in spelling, the use of upper and lower case, and punctuation. The amount of attention that has to be focused on lower-level abilities is assumed to interact with higher order skills of organizing and the generation of content (Srinawati & Alwi, 2020). Moreover, lack of knowledge relating to the topic content of the script to be written. The actual goal is crucial, as is the writer's demonstration of the various genres, the writing's accessibility and organization, and the ways in which the reader can be guided through the work. Understanding the procedure is crucial for assessment and metacognition (Saleem et al.,

2021). The final is insufficient use of effective planning or rewriting techniques. Because this approach emphasizes the individual processes that make up writing creation, it takes a cognitive approach to helping students who struggle with writing (Toba et al., 2019).

Based on the researcher's preliminary observation in a senior high school when conducting the Professional Training Program (PLP) II there were still many students got difficulty in writing descriptive text. They were not able to generate a good composing descriptive text. They had difficulty selecting appropriate words. The sentences constructed were poor grammar. The sentences that should be structured by using simple present tense were produced by using past tense. The students also did not add 's' or 'es' in verbs where the sentence has singular pronouns. They often could not punctuate correctly. The teacher said that in writing class most of the students in the class are not enthusiastic and tend to think that they are not good at writing, unable to express their ideas for writing, lack of motivation and learning media, lack of vocabulary and difficulty in arranging words into sentences. In conclusion, writing is considered a complex skill that is difficult to master and understand. Nevertheless, writing also became new of the critical language skills that need to be mastered by students because it facilitates students to learn and communicate in written form. The finding of this research related to the teachers' difficulties in teaching writing.

Although students' difficulty in writing descriptive texts is not a new phenomenon, the ways of overcoming this challenge and the specific factors that contribute to it are changing as a result of changes in educational environments and student demographics. The novelty of students' difficulties in writing descriptive texts has also become a debate regarding standardized tests in assessing students' writing skills. Because of this debate, a more comprehensive method for assessing student writing is needed, which includes formative and summative evaluation as well as providing useful feedback for students. The novelty of this research is the demographics of students at secondary school level and the way students engage with and learn from educational content has changed as a result of the growing use of digital tools and online resources. This change may present new difficulties for authors of descriptive texts, such as the requirement to successfully incorporate multimedia components and adjust to the needs of digital communication.

Considering the background, the researcher is interested in analyzing the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text in a Senior High School at Palopo, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. It is important to investigate the reason students struggle in constructing descriptive texts and what are the causes, as this is a prevalent issue, particularly in junior

high school when writing descriptive texts considered a basic text in English lessons. Specifically, this study will investigate the following two research questions:

1. What are students' difficulties in writing descriptive text?
2. What causes students to have difficulty in writing descriptive text?

This research will contribute theoretically related to writing strategies, especially descriptive text, and practically will be important information for teachers to formulate strategies and design appropriate learning methods to improve basic writing skills, and to trigger and encourage students' habits of thinking, organizing ideas, and developing abilities. critical thinking.

METHOD

Research design

The research applied descriptive qualitative research to explore and understand the meaning of individuals or groups related to social problems that can be used to interpret, survey, or gain a deeper understanding of certain aspects, beliefs, attitudes, or human behavior. It is used to analyze the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text.

Participant

The subject of this study was a 12th grade senior high school student consisting of over 30 students. The subject was taken purposively because they have studied descriptive text writing since the first grade of high school and they already have experience writing descriptively text every semester.

Techniques of collecting data

The source of data in this research is the students' descriptive text, interview scripts, and observation sheets. To collect the data, the researcher collected students' work in writing descriptive texts, interview the students to know the difficulties, asked the English teacher, and observed the teaching and learning process in the classroom. All the data is used to determine the reasons why some students have difficulties in composing the descriptive texts.

Techniques of data analysis

The data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification interactive approach from Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) was employed by the researcher to analyze the data. First, the researcher reduced the amount of data by identifying and removing the particular information that was required from the greater number of data. The researcher reduced the data before classifying it and presenting it in a

table. After receiving the classification, the researcher presented the data as descriptions and discussed it. The researcher then came to a conclusion.

FINDINGS

Student's difficulties in writing descriptive text

There are three students' difficulties in writing descriptive text based on the results observations and interviews, as presented in the following table:

Table 1: Student Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text

<i>Student difficulties</i>	<i>Findings</i>
<i>1. Difficult to follow the generic structures</i>	<i>The students are difficult to organize the identification (the part of paragraph that introduces the character) and description (the part of paragraph that describes the character) of descriptive text</i>
<i>2. Difficult to use the linguistics features</i>	<i>The students are difficult in using simple present tense, subject-verb agreement, singular-plural and reference, and word choice.</i>
<i>3. Misuse of writing mechanics</i>	<i>Students got mistakes in spelling, using punctuation, capitalization, and apostrophes</i>

1. Students are difficult to follow the generic structure of descriptive text

My mother's name is Halisa. My mother is a teacher. She is diligent and smart. She loves gardening. She likes to plant flowers and vegetables in my house and in the school.

Based on the results of the students' work, the researcher discovered that students had difficulties understanding the generic structure of descriptive text. The generic structure of descriptive text consisted of two paragraphs; identification and description. However, student X only created one paragraph. It was found that it was difficult for students to write down the identification section as the first paragraph. This section serves to introduce the reader to the object that we will describe. However, most students immediately write the description section and explain in detail the characteristics of the object without writing down the identification. It happens because students do not understand the generic structure of the descriptive text and do not know what needs to be written in the identification and description sections.

2. Students are difficult to use the linguistics features of descriptive text

In linguistics features, the students are difficult in using simple present tense, subject-verb agreement, singular-plural and reference

a. Using simple present tense

Students' writing: *The cat **like** to eat fish*

Correct sentence: *The cat **likes** to eat fish*

In one of the aforementioned cases, it is evident that students struggle in using simple present tense. In general, generally students' mistakes are in the use of "s/es". Many of them are still unable to use the simple present tense.

b. Using subject-verb agreement

Students' writing: *The elephant **have** wide ears*

Correct sentence : *The elephant **has** wide ears*

The aforementioned illustration only represents a small portion of the student's subject-verb agreement errors. subject verb agreement refers to how the verb and subject of the phrase are adjusted. Some students fail to grasp the use of "s/es" suffix in the subject verb agreement.

c. Using singular-plural

Students' writing : *She has two **childs***

Correct sentence : *She has two **children***

The previously mentioned example demonstrates how students can misuse singular and plural nouns. The number of nouns or the determinants utilized determine whether singular or plural terms should be used. However, a lot of students are still confused how to use it, particularly when employing irregular plural nouns like children, man-men, etc. There are also some who don't use the article "a, an, the" in singular noun like the example below:

Students' writing: - Elephant can eat 150 kg food/day

Correct sentence : An elephant can eat 150 kg of food per day

d. Using pronoun reference

Pronouns must always refer clearly to the noun they represent (antecedent. It must agree in number with the noun it refers to. However many errors found in this case as follows:

Students' writing : *She live with **his** parents*

Correct sentence : *She lives with **her** parents*

This error occurs because students do not fully understand the rules of using pronouns reference.

3. Students are misuse of writing mechanics

a. Misuse of Similar spelling and words

There are many types of words and phrases that are quite confusing and misused in a sentence. The wrong use of the word can change the meaning of a sentence, resulting in misinterpretation. The example below is a student's mistake in choosing similar words:

Students' writing : *Her mother has a sharp nose **to***

Correct sentence : *Her mother has a sharp nose **too***

b. Mistakes of punctuation, capitalization and apostrophe

Students' writing: ***my** father hair is black and curly*

Correct sentence : ***My** father's hair is black and curly.*

The aforementioned illustration demonstrates that students lack knowledge of proper capitalization, apostrophe, and punctuation usage.

Causes Student Difficulty in Writing Descriptive Text

1. Students are less practice in writing descriptive

According to the findings of the interviews, students rarely learn how to write descriptive text. They struggled with the generic form of a descriptive text, in which students had to organize their ideas into appropriate paragraphs and provide text descriptions. The students said that they had some difficulties in writing descriptive text especially in generic structure, grammar, and word spelling as the interview excerpt below:

Excerpt 1: I often read descriptive text but we rarely practice writing it.

Excerpt 2: I don't know, apparently there is a descriptive text structure. I just write according to my thoughts, describe according to my imagination without a pattern

2. Students lacked of writing idea

This study discovered that one of the reasons students struggled with writing was a lack of ideas. They struggle to produce ideas when given a theme since they lack knowledge of the content. They struggle to express their ideas clearly. it was proved with the findings of the following student interviews:

Excerpt 3: I have a hard time writing because I don't know what to write

Excerpt 4 : Usually, when I write, I suddenly get stuck. I'm out of ideas

According to the data presented above, the source of the students' difficulty was a lack of understanding of the descriptive text material. Their troubles could be due to a lack of knowledge about the subject matter of the script to be written. The student stated that they didn't grasp the material of descriptive text and that it was difficult to understand.

3. Students lacked of vocabulary mastery

According to the observations and portfolios, students were unable to form sentences appropriately or develop ideas coherently when writing descriptive pieces. When students try to write down their ideas, they become overwhelmed. According to the portfolio results, students do not grasp how to use words. It does not consider the category vocabulary utilized. They seem to choose words solely because of the meaning of sentence completion. In brief, the selection error happened due to a lack of vocabulary among the students.

4. Students less of motivation in learning English

Based on the results observations in class, students are less enthusiastic participating in class activities because students consider writing as a tiring activity. It is supported by the students interview below:

Excerpt 5: I am less interested in English

Excerpt 6: I think English is difficult

Based on the data presented above, the researcher concluded that one of the causes contributing to the students' difficulty was a lack of motivation in studying English. The majority of the students stated that they were uninterested in learning English because they think English is difficult to master.

Discussion

Each learner might face several problems when learning to write. These problems will prevent students from developing toward producing an acceptable piece of writing.

According to the finding of this research, the students main difficulties is to construct the generic structure of descriptive writing. They were unsure how to write the identification (the section of the paragraph that introduces the character) and description (the section of the paragraph that details the character). In the description, both generic structures (identification and description) should be written in a structured way (Laili, 2022; Noprianto, 2017). The researcher feels that the majority of the participants are unaware of the importance of identification in the construction of descriptive text.

This lack of skill should be overcome by raising awareness about the identification process (Siburian, 2013). The differences between general and specific participants should be understood by all students (Husna, n.d.). Furthermore, English learners and teachers should be aware with group processes such as identifying and attributive (Ismayanti & Kholiq, 2020). The finding implies dissatisfaction because the majority of the participants in this study were unable to write identifications based on the theory. Furthermore, the prior researcher concurs with this finding. Identification must be written with the identifying process and the participants being token and worth.

The second findings of the research is the difficulties in the use of linguistic features. Students struggle with simple present tense, subject-verb agreement, singular-plural and reference, and word choice. They have very poor grammatical knowledge, which causes them worry while writing phrases with proper grammar. Reading and grammar-related activities can help you enhance grammatical skills (Farooq & Uzair-ul-hassan, 2012).

Students should be encouraged to write regularly and get valuable feedback on their work. Teachers, friends, or even computer programs like spell and grammar checkers can provide this feedback (Zuhriyah, 2017). Students will improve their ability to use words correctly the more they practice and get feedback. Throughout the writing process, teachers should to offer guidance, making use of outlines, notes, and early draft feedback. This advice assists students in creating a writing process consisting of editing and revision, which is essential in enhancing writing quality and grammar in general. Spell and grammar checks are two examples of quality-tilting technology that can help them find and fix writing problems.

The other difficulties is students were confused in writing mechanics. Students made spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and apostrophe problems. Writing mechanics are crucial because they help writers ensure that their readers understand what they are saying (Toba et al., 2019). To solve this problem, teach students word analysis techniques and phonics rules to assist them decode new words. Spelling errors can be greatly decreased with this method. Additionally, increase the vocabulary mastery by introducing new terms and encouraging them to deduce meanings from context (Mcmaster et al., 2019). They may be able to recognize and spell new words more accurately as a result. Teach them the fundamentals of capitalization as well, emphasizing proper nouns, titles, and the first word of a phrase (Baresh, 2022).

A number of factors contribute to student errors in descriptive text writing. The first is a lack of writing practice. Students believe that their lack of writing practice is due to a lack of

writing motivation (Camacho et al., 2021). Students feel tired since writing is considered as a time-consuming task. The second problem is a lack of writing ideas. They have difficulty generating and arranging ideas. Students had just written a few phrases. The writing did not fully describe the described object. Students will lack ideas and language to write if they are not reading books or other reading materials. The third factor is a lack of vocabulary, which has caused students to struggle with developing writing skills. The students' lack of language competence caused the word selection error. Students with limited vocabulary might use electronic dictionaries and increase reading activities. Last but not least, last but not the least, lack of motivation is another challenge faced by the students. If students are not motivated, they may be unwilling to continue their learning process. Motivation plays an important role in increasing students' learning outcomes (Gbollie & Keamu, 2017; Law, M.Y et al., 2019).

Teachers can choose the best strategy for teaching writing skills by providing feedback (Ruegg, 2014) and coaching if they are aware of their students' problems in creating descriptive text and the aspects that contribute to them (Husna, n.d.). Furthermore, the school management should take the appropriate efforts to address the challenges that teachers face to facilitate effective teaching. Finally, teachers may emphasize the importance of developing writing skills to students to encourage them to do so

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, three general difficulties were found for students in writing descriptive text, including 1) difficult to follow the generic structure of descriptive text; 2) difficult to use the linguistic features, and 3) misuse of writing mechanics. These difficulties are caused by several factors, including 1) the students are lacking in writing practice; 2) lack of writing ideas; 3) lack of vocabulary mastery; and 4) lack of motivation in learning English.

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