

Students' Ability and Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text

¹Linya Wiyasti*, ²Edi Wahyono, ³Rizal A.M Sjachrun

^{1,2,3}Universitas Cokroaminoto Palopo, Indonesia

**Indonesian Journal of
Learning Studies (IJLS)**

Vol. 4, No. 1, 2024

E-SSN 2775-5231

Corresponding Email

Linya Wiyasti

dexlindya@gmail.com

Published by:

**Perkumpulan Dosen Muslim
Indonesia**



Copyright © 2024

The Author(s)

This article is licensed under
CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 License



Abstract

This research aims to analyze the students' ability and difficulty in writing descriptive text at tenth grade students of SMK Celebes Luwu Utara. This research was conducted on January 31st, 2024. This research was designed as descriptive quantitative research. The number of sample in this research were 13 students. The researcher used writing test and questionnaire as the instruments of the research. Writing test was used to find out students' writing ability, while questionnaire was used to find out students' difficulty in writing descriptive text. The result of this research showed that the students' writing ability was average. Total mean score in writing was 65,0 which was classified as average level category. The students also had difficulties in writing descriptive text in term of language use (64%), followed by content (61%), vocabulary (61%), organization (60%), and mechanics (60%). The students need to study in order to improve their writing skill because their ability is at the average level, moreover in language use aspect.

Keywords: *descriptive text, ability, difficulty*

Introduction

English has become a global communication tool that can facilitate us to communicate with other people in different countries both spoken and written. In this globalization era, English dominates the technological development and becomes the communication key that cannot be separated. In learning English, there are four skills that must be mastered. Those are speaking, writing, reading, and listening. There are two parameters that are related to the four basic skills: the mode of communication: oral or written, and the direction of communication: receiving or producing the message (Supina, 2018). Speaking and writing are productive skills. Reading and listening are receptive skills. Writing is one of the most essential skills, and it requires a lot of ability to create and develop ideas into interesting text.

Writing is an activity to express ideas using written language as its tool. According to Widiati and Cahyono (2006), writing is a very complex language skill that pours ideas in the brain into writing, but writers are required to control several variables. To be able to create good writing, the writer must pay attention to grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and so on. Writing is one of the skills that need to be developed because it is useful in the field of an academic context, personal life, job, or business in the global community. There are many benefits of mastering this skill, such as the learner can express ideas and opinions, it provides information, it can improve the learner's creativity to convey ideas in writing, and it is a good tool for communicating with others.

Based on the curriculum of vocational high school, some texts are learned by students. One of the texts is descriptive text. Descriptive text is a text that describes and reveals what a person or a thing is like which is related to the senses of shape, sound, taste, etc. Kane in (Karyati, 2020) explained that "Description is about sensory experience how something looks, sounds, tastes. Mostly it is about visual experience, but description also deals with other kinds of perception".

Literature review

1. Writing

Writing is a form of human communication using symbols (letters of the alphabet, punctuation, and spaces) to convey thoughts and ideas in a written form. Jayanti (2019) stated that writing is a language skill used to communicate indirectly, in case people cannot face to face each other. Through writing, we can spread not only information to the public but also create something in written form.

According to Cox in (Nawawi, 2011), the purposes of writing are to inform, to amuse, to satirize, and to persuade. Writing is an activity to transfer ideas or opinions to the written form. Hughes in (Astrianingsih, 2021), some components should be mastered when the writer is writing. They are content (it is the ideas, facts, or information), organization (it is the method that the writer uses to structure the writing), vocabulary (the effective use of words needs to be mastered to create such good writing for the reader), language use

(different level of formality in writing affects the style that will be used to fit the writer's purpose), and mechanics (it is the rules and conventions governing the technical aspects of written language, such as punctuation, spelling, capitalization, abbreviations, etc.).

2. Descriptive Text

Descriptive text is from the word "describe" which means to give details about what someone or something is like. Furthermore, descriptive text is a type of text that explains what a person or a thing is like. Gerot and Wignel; Knapp and Watkins in (Noprianto, 2017) state that descriptive text is a text which describes a particular thing, person, animal, place, and event to the readers or hearer. The purpose of descriptive text is to describe and reveal an object in detail. According to White (1986:61), the aim of descriptive text is to help readers see the objects, persons, and sensations you present.

According to Mukarto in (Novita, 2017), descriptive text has two generic structures. There are two main parts in descriptive text, which are identification is to describe and contain the general topic introduction of a person or thing that is described, and description, it includes more specific details about the object that is being described, like its physical appearance, characteristics, and qualities. In writing descriptive text, there are language features that have to be used, such as a specific participant, using adjective, the use of simple present tense, using action verb and adverb.

Method

The researcher used descriptive quantitative research. Descriptive research may include investigations to classify phenomena, occurrences that have taken place in this context, or actual issues. Sugiyono in (Kristiana et al., 2021) stated that descriptive research is a study conducted to identify variables, whether the variable is one or even more without comparing or relating them to other factors. Quantitative research is a type of research that collects and analyzes numerical data through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, or by the use of computing techniques to modify existing statistical data.

The research was held at SMK Celebes which is located in Luwu Utara Regency, South Sulawesi. The research was conducted in January 2024. The researcher used a purposive sampling technique. According to Sugiyono in (Anhar et al., (2023), it is a strategy for sampling data sources with specific details. The number of students were 13 students because they had studied descriptive text material from the previous semester, which corresponds to the criteria of the researcher's need. There were two research instruments used. Writing test as the instrumentation to collect data of students' writing ability in English descriptive text, and questionnaire which was conducted to gather data on the cause of students's difficulties.

To analyze the students' ability to write descriptive text, the researcher found out the students' mean score by using the following formula:

$$\bar{X} = \frac{x_1 + x_2}{N}$$

The researcher used the writing score table criteria proposed by Depdiknas to classify students' ability in writing descriptive text (Syarifuddin in Kadir, 2019).

Table 1 Students' level criterion and percentage of writing score

No.	Classification	Score
1	Very good	90-100
2	Good	70-89
3	Average	50-69
4	Poor	30-49
5	Very poor	10-29

To find out the difficulties in writing descriptive text from the questionnaires, the researcher used the percentage technique as follows:

$$P = \frac{f}{N} \times 100\%$$

The questionnaire is set to likert scales: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. There are five response alternatives in the original likert scale. The component of writing that is used in this research is based on Brown in (Astrianingsih, 2021).

Table 2 Score of likert scale

Scale	
Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	2
Agree	3
Strongly agree	4

Table 3 Criteria in the interpretation of respondents based on likert scale

Interval	Criteria
81.24%-100%	Very difficult
62,49-81,25%	Difficult
43,74%-62,50%	Moderate
25%-43,75%	Easy

Result and Discussion

1. Students' Ability in Writing Descriptive Text

The researcher used writing test to analyze students' ability in writing descriptive text. The result of the writing test was analyzed by using the aspect of writing proposed by Jacob et. Al, as follows: Content, Organization, Vocabulary, Language Use, and Mechanics. There

were 13 samples of 10th grade students who participated in this test. The result showed that the score they got were different. After assessing the students' writing test derived from 2 rates was 64,8 (Average). The table below shows the students' average score of writing test result.

Table 4 Students' Average Score

Aspect	Rater 1	Rater 2	Average	Level
Content	19,8	19,1	19,5	Fair to Poor
Organization	12,9	12,6	12,75	Fair to Poor
Vocabulary	11,7	13,5	12,6	Fair to Poor
Language Use	15,7	16	15,9	Fair to Poor
Mechanics	4,1	3,3	4,1	Good to Average
Total			64,8	Average

The first aspect is content. Content must be appropriate with the topic to form paragraphs that explain one idea. The level of students in content of writing was Fair to Poor (19,5) because most of their writings were limited knowledge of subject, little substance, inadequate development of topic. To form a good writing content, it should be knowledgeable, substantive, through development of thesis, and relevant to the assigned topic. In writing descriptive text some students made an error in the content aspect in writing, such as writing that was not relevant to the assigned topic.

The second aspect of writing test is organization. Based on the result of students' writing test, the total score in this aspect was 12,75 which indicated the students' level Fair to Poor. The students' writing organization was non-fluent, ideas confused or disconnected, and lack logical sequencing and development. In general, descriptive text consists of identification and description. However, most of students lack of understanding about descriptive text structure.

The third aspect is vocabulary. Vocabulary is a set of words. It contains the correctness of word/idiom form, choice, and usage. In this research, the students got the Fair to Poor level with the average score 12,6. There are errors made by the students on the writing especially in word choice, for examples "amazed with him" – "amazed at him", "to help anyone needed" – "to help anyone in need", "a naught and naughty little brother" – "a disobedient little brother".

The next category is language use. The result of the students' writing test showed that they got Fair to Poor level with the average score 15,9 in this category. This category evaluates the students' ability in forming appropriate sentence structures. The use of subject-verb agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, preposition was observed. Here are the examples of the students' errors in language use category as follows: "because my friends are always bullied me" – "because my friends always bully me", "I have friend" – "I have a friend", "he is a member of the seventh generation" – "she is a member of the seventh generation", "he has a tall body and has a sweet smile and also has crooked teeth and fangs" – "he has a tall body, a sweet smile, and crooked teeth and fangs". These examples represent the students' error in tense, article, pronoun, and conjunction.

The last category is mechanics. Mechanics relate to spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. In this aspect, the students got Good to Average level with the average score 4,1. It means that the students made occasional error of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Despite of that, the meaning of the sentence is not obscure. However, there are errors made by the students in this category, for examples: "I want to go to the right school sutdy hard and make my parent proud of me and I want to make my parents happy" – "I want to go to the right school, study hard and make my parent proud of me and I want to make my parents happy.", "he's very good at playing Mobile lejens" – "He's very good at playing Mobile Legend."

2. The Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text

There are 20 statements that talk about students' difficulty in writing descriptive text. there are 5 scopes that were asked in this questionnaire, such as organization, mechanics, language use, vocabulary, and content, and each scope has 4 statements that have to be answered. Here are the following result of the recapitulation of students' questionnaire answer:

Table 5 recapitulation of students' questionnaire answer

Indicator	SDA	DA	A	SA	Total Score	%	Criteria
Content	16	26	24	60	126	61%	Moderate
Organization	17	22	30	56	125	60%	Moderate
Vocabulary	13	32	30	52	127	61%	Moderate
Language Use	9	28	57	40	134	64%	Difficult
Mechanics	18	16	42	48	124	60%	Moderate

According to questiones that were asked through a questionnaire about content, some students (61%) answered that they had difficulty in writing descriptive text because they did not have enough knowlegde about the topic that they wanted to describe. While the others had no difficulty in it. The students (60%) also found it neither easy nor difficult in this organization aspect. Some of them had difficulty to organize the text, and the other had no difficulty to organize the text. Vocabulary is categorized as moderate criteria in writing descriptive text. some students (61%) answered they had difficulty in describing thing due to limited vocabulary and also wrote repetition of words. On the other had, the other had enough vocabulary and did not write repetition of words. Language use is difficult for student in writing descriptive text. There are (64%) students who answers that they had difficulty in understanding and using correct grammar. Some students (60%) had difficulty in using punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. While the others had no difficulty in mechanics. This aspect is moderate for students.

Conclusion

According to the result, the students' mean score is 65,0. It implies the students' ability in writing descriptive text is at Average level category and need to be improved. The students' writing score show that only mechanics aspect that has Good to Average level. On the other hand, content, organization, vocabulary, and language use are in Fair to Poor level.

Therefore, students' ability in these four aspects categorized low and they need to practice and improve their writing ability. This result supported by the result of the questionnaire of the tenth grade students of SMK Celebes that still have difficulties in writing descriptive text, especially in language use aspect (64%), followed by content (61%), vocabulary (61%), organization (60%), and mechanics (60%).

References

- Alfiani, Diyah Alifah. (2022). *An Investigation of Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text*. State Islamic University Of Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta.
- Anhar, Andi Fausia., Abduh, A., & Aeni, N. (2023). An Analysis of Students' Ability and Difficulty in Writing Descriptive Text. *Journal of Technology in Language Pedagogy*. 2(3). 409-410.
- Aprilianty et al. (2022). Students Ability and Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text
- Astrianingsih. (2021). *An Analysis of Students' Ability in Writing Descriptive Text at the First Grade of SMAN 1 Kuala Kampar*. Islamic University of Riau.
- Balansa, Gabriela Anastasya., Muntuuntu, M., & Kamagi, S. (2023). An Analysis of Students' Ability and Difficulty in Writing Descriptive Text at SMP Negeri 2 Tondano. *Journal of Teaching English, Linguistics, and Literature*. 2(11). 1420-1421.
- Banne, R. (2023). *Teaching Writing Descriptive Text By Using Picture Word Model Inductive (PWIM) to the Eighth Grade Students' at SMP Negeri 6 Palopo*. Cokroaminoto Palopo University.
- Cahyono, B. Y., & Widiati, U. (2006). The teaching of EFL writing in Indonesian context: the state of art. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 13(3), 139–150.
- Fitri, I., Eripuddin, Rahayu, P. (2017). *An Analysis of The Students' Skill in Writing Descriptive Text at the Eighth Grade of SMP 7 Tambusai Utara*. University of Pasir Pengaraian.
- Hafizah, W. (2023). *An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text*. Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University.
- Jayanti, Ade Dwi. (2019). Students' Writing Ability on English Descriptive Text at Grade VIII in SMPN 33 Padang. *Academic Journal of English Language and Education*, 3(1), 72-73.
- Kadir, Muhammad Farid Ghazali. 2019. *Students' Ability and Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text at Third Semester at Muhammadiyah University of Makassar*.
- Karyati. (2020). Peningkatan Kompetensi Menulis Teks Descriptive Melalui Teknik Pembelajaran "Simpan Pinjam" Pada Peserta Didik Kelas VIII D Semester II SMP Negeri 15 Semarang Tahun Pelajaran 2018/2019. *ORBITH*, 16(2), 109-116.
- Kristiana, N., Yunita, W., & Syahrial, S. (2021). Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text at the Seventh Grade of SMP Sint Carolus Bengkulu. *Linguists: Journal Of Linguistics and Language Teaching*, 7(1), 67-76.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. SAGE Publications.
- Nawawi, Muhammad Bagus. (2011). *Improving Students' Writing Skill of Descriptive Text Through Guided Question*. Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University.