

An Analysis of Difficulties Faced by the Third Grade Students of SMP Santa Veronika Pekanbaru in Writing Descriptive Texts

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze the difficulties students face in writing descriptive texts. Using a qualitative method, data was collected through a Likert scale questionnaire and a written test involving 25 respondents at the Junior High School. Based on the analysis, it was found that students experience difficulties mainly in five aspects: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Factors influencing these difficulties include limited vocabulary, minimal understanding of text structure, lack of writing practice, and challenges with grammar. Additionally, students' lack of interest in writing also affects their writing outcomes. The study concludes that a teaching approach focusing on writing fundamentals and enhancing students' interest in writing is needed. Recommendations for teachers include providing continuous writing practice and supplying engaging support materials to address obstacles in writing descriptive texts.

Keywords: Writing Difficulties, Descriptive Text, Qualitative Method, Writing Skills, Junior High School



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INTRUDUCTION

English is a global language that people use to communicate. As a global language, it cannot be separated from the talents that must be mastered by the person, especially students. In every aspect of life, English is a language that has many applications. English serves as a unifying language in today's globalized world, and is used in many fields. About sixty sovereign countries use it as one of their official languages or as their official language, making it the most widely studied second language. There are more people learning English as a second language than native speakers. English education at school can help students communicate and interact socially while learning English. English is an important language that students must master. There are many skills in English, including listening, speaking, reading and writing. These various talents must be mastered by students. Furthermore, one of the English language talents that has to be strengthened is writing, particularly in theory since it calls for a variety of sophisticated abilities like word development, grammar use, and proper syntax.

Writing is one of the skills that can be called an outcome of learning English. Therefore, teaching students how to write effectively in English is crucial to their success in mastering English. The main purpose of writing is to express the ideas that are in someone's head. Another purpose, especially composing, means to specify what is in someone's soul or feelings that are recorded in written form. Writing is a process designed by someone to reflect on and think about ideas, and make them real and concrete. Writing empowers thinking and learning. Therefore, students must be able to investigate with their brains to create good written work that is interesting to read. If the work they write is not concrete, then the work or exposition will not be interesting for some people to read. Without having very intelligent abilities, students cannot make sentences or texts well. Many students cannot write English text perfectly because writing is not an easy skill for students to master. So, there must be more

effective learning so that students' writing skills become perfect. The function of written results is as a permanent archive that can be used, read and studied from present to future, so that it becomes an important tool for education. In fact, many people find it difficult to write due to language or spoken differences. Writing requires the use of several language-related skills, including capitalization, paragraph organization, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary. Students are expected to be able to express their creativity in writing, therefore teaching writing is very important. A writer must also be proficient in every aspect of the subject matter they are writing about. After that, written work must be useful, clear, easy to understand, and contain high-quality content. Based on the 2013 Curriculum, students should be mastered some texts. The Junior High School students are required to study descriptive, narrative, report, and announcement text. Descriptive text is a type of writing that aims to clearly describe a person, place, object or event in detail. The researcher chooses a descriptive text because descriptive text is one of the texts that should be mastered by third-year students of Junior High School students. The students are still having trouble writing at this point. The understudy's troubles recorded as a hard copy of a text can be brought about by the absence of jargon, less comprehension of language, etc. Text is a piece of language. All things considered, a text remains solitary as a demonstration of correspondence. Also, the meaning of the text is made in various ways as per everyday and logical language. As a result, students may find it challenging to write a text, particularly one that is descriptive. Although the understudies have found out how to portray somebody, creature, or things, the understudies actually are not ready to compose engaging great.

However, according to previous research, currently students still experience difficulties in writing. Many factors cause this to happen in the learning process. Students' difficulties in taking notes on a text can be caused by a lack of ideas, a lack of language understanding, and so on. Text is a part of language. In addition, the meaning of the text is created in various ways according to everyday language and logic. As a result, students may experience difficulty in writing texts, especially descriptive texts. Even though students have learned to describe a person, creature, or object, students are not actually able to write well. One potential problem is the difficulty of organizing thoughts and arranging them clearly and cohesively. Students may experience difficulty in preparing an outline for their writing which includes the introduction, content and conclusion of what they will write. It is also possible that a lack of knowledge and skills in creating English texts is one of the causes. Students are also not used to writing in English outside of class, so their writing skills are considered less strong.

The difficulties experienced by students in producing English texts may be caused by several different causes, according to the personal experience obtained by researchers during the teaching practice process at Santa Veronika Middle School. One of the factors that researchers found was a lack of ideas. Students have difficulty creating ideas in writing descriptive text. Students also find it difficult and unmotivated to write in English because writing requires a lot of cognitive and linguistic approaches. In English, one of the limitations is the form and boundaries of sentences. Then students also experience difficulty in finding the right words or constructing grammatically accurate sentences. They have difficulty writing because they don't understand how to arrange words in a sentence. The next problem is the lack of vocabulary. Students lack the vocabulary to choose the right words. Then the last thing is the problem of lack of understanding of grammar. Lack of ability to understand the correct use of grammar, which includes the use of subject-verb-object (Subject-Verb-Object), the use of tenses (time), and the correct use of conjunctions.

The first step in improving the quality of education in general is to understand these difficulties. To overcome this, the role of the teacher is needed. Teachers should have the right

techniques so that students are able to overcome these difficulties and be able to write well. Teachers must apply effective teaching methods. Researchers are interested in this subject for this specific reason. Researchers can contribute to the development of more successful approaches to teaching English writing skills by first gaining knowledge about the difficulties students face. This assistance also helps build curricula that are more relevant to student needs and encourage innovative approaches to education. To provide students with a productive and interesting learning atmosphere, this is very important. Apart from education and linguistics, the study of the difficulties students face when writing also contributes to the body of knowledge and academic literature in this subject. Understanding the difficulties students experience when writing in English not only helps improve the overall quality of education, but also contributes to the creation of more effective and diverse teaching strategies. Therefore, based on these problems, in this research, the writer want to analyze the common difficulties faced by the students in writing descriptive texts with the research title "An Analysis of Difficulties Faced by the Third Grade Students of SMP Santa Veronika Pekanbaru in Writing Descriptive Texts".

The Formulation of the Problem: What are the common difficulties faced by the third grade students of SMP Santa Veronika Pekanbaru in writing descriptive texts? The objective of this research is to analyze the common difficulties faced by the third grade students of SMP Santa Veronika Pekanbaru in writing descriptive texts. By conducting this research, it is expected to give contributions for students, teachers, school and other reseacrhrs, as follows:

1. The results of this research will inform students about the problems they face in writing descriptive texts. Then they will also know how to solve problems with the help of the teacher.
2. The results of this research will inform teachers about the problems that students often face in writing descriptive texts, so that teachers can help students solve these problems.
3. The results of this research will provide school input regarding the basis for effective and efficient learning methodologies and policies to improve English language learning abilities.
4. The results of this research will be a useful reference for other researchers, contributing to collective knowledge in the field.

The Definition of terms

To prevent any confusion or misinterpretation, the researcher has provided the following definitions for the terms utilized in this study:

1. Difficulty: According to Simpson and Weiner (1989) in Oxford English Dictionary , "difficulty" is broadly defined as the state or condition of being difficult, or requiring much effort or skill to accomplish, deal with, or understand. The term "difficulty" encompasses both physical and mental effort to overcome obstacles and the subjective experience of struggling with a problem, often discussed in educational psychology. Vygotsky (1978) offers a specific perspective by defining "difficulty" as the level of challenge that a task presents to a learner. Tasks that are too easy do not promote growth, while those that are too difficult can lead to frustration and disengagement. Thus, the concept of difficulty is closely tied to the optimal conditions for learning, where the challenge is sufficient to push the learner's capabilities but still achievable with appropriate support (Alharbi, 2023). Furthermore, in the context of language acquisition, the concept of "difficulty" takes on a more nuanced meaning. Xu *et al.* (2022) describe "difficulty" in language learning as a measure of the cognitive load required to perform a specific task. Difficulty is a complex concept that varies depending on context and individual factors. In this research, difficulty means students' problems in writing descriptive texts which include organization, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics and good content related to descriptive texts.

2. Writing. According to Merriam (2002) in Merriam-Webster Dictionary, writing is defined as the act or process of forming visible letters and characters on a surface, particularly with a pen or pencil, and serves as a primary means of communication. However, writing extends far beyond this basic mechanical function. As explored by Harmer (2004), writing is a complex cognitive process that involves more than just the physical act of forming words on a page. Writing, therefore, is not a linear or simplistic task but rather an intricate activity that engages the writer's mental faculties on multiple levels (Giawa, 2022). Further expanding on the nature of writing, Ahmed et al. (2022) argue that writing is not merely a mechanical act but a social activity that involves interaction with readers. Writing is a dynamic and complex process that integrates both cognitive and social elements. The definitions provided by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Harmer (2004), and Ahmed et al. (2022) collectively illustrate that writing is a skill that requires not only technical proficiency but also an understanding of the social context in which it occurs. In this research, writing means expressing ideas, thoughts, or information using five components in writing, there are organization, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics and appropriate content. This component will also be used by students when writing descriptive texts.
3. Descriptive Text. Descriptive text, as defined by Trimarco, P (1998) in the Cambridge Dictionary, is a type of text that offers a detailed account of a person, place, object, or event, with the primary purpose of creating a vivid image in the reader's mind. By using descriptive language, writers can evoke emotions, set a tone, and create a strong sense of presence in their narrative, allowing readers to feel as if they are experiencing the scene themselves. According to Gerot and Wignell (1994), descriptive text is recognized as a genre of writing specifically designed to convey the characteristics and features of a particular subject. Further supporting the importance of descriptive text, Faizeh and Sholah (2020) highlight its role in early educational settings, where it is often employed to develop students' observational and recording skills. Descriptive text in education enhances students' cognitive and expressive abilities, preparing them for advanced writing and comprehension levels. In this study descriptive text means well-written and correct text that uses five writing factors, namely organization, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics and content that describe about people, places and things correctly.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative descriptive research. To explain the current situation in the region, the aim of this research is to collect information about this problem. Within the scope of this research, researchers used qualitative descriptive techniques for surveys. To answer certain questions about the status of research subjects, such as organization, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics and content of a particular group of individuals, descriptive research or quantitative surveys collect data to answer questions about the difficulties they face. This research will be conducted at SMP Santa Veronika Pekanbaru from February 2024 and it is expected to complete in November 2024. It is located on Jl. Palas Pastoran, Palas, Rumbai District, Pekanbaru.

The population in this research is the third year students of SMP Santa Veronika Pekanbaru. Currently, there is only one class for the third grade in this school with a total of 25 students. Sampling is a method of selecting a subset of people to participate in research in a way that accurately reflects the characteristics of a larger group. Simple random sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling, and systematic sampling are four fundamental methods or processes used in different types of purposive sampling (Campbell, 2020). The way to determine sampling is by randomly selecting a group population. Arikunto (2006) states that if

the subject is less than one hundred, it is better to take all as a sample, but if the subject is more than one hundred, it is advisable to take 10-15%, 20-25% or more. In this study, the population of all third grade students of Santa Veronika Junior High School Pekanbaru was 25 students, so the researcher decided to take all students to be the sample of this study. According to Sugiyono, (2016: 85) the method of determining saturated samples or total sampling is a sampling technique when all members of the population are used as samples.

In qualitative terms, data collection techniques can be classified into five categories: document review, interviews, survey/questionnaires, probability sampling, and interviews. The present research will employ questionnaire, written test, and interview methods for data collection. A questionnaire is a research instrument that gathers data from participants through the administration of a set of inquiries accompanied by additional recommendations. While this is often the case, their primary purpose is not typically to facilitate statistical analysis of the responses. The author uses a questionnaire as a method in this research because it is in accordance with the research objective, namely collecting data about the difficulties usually experienced by students. So using a questionnaire will produce efficient and valid data. A questionnaire is an efficient method for collecting data that does not include any kind of direct connection and also asks questions that are more generic in nature. As part of the data collection process, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the first grade students of SMP Santa Veronika Pekanbaru and then applied for it. Following that, the respondents are required to choose their responses from the questionnaire. There is no response that is correct or incorrect. According to the circumstances of each individual student. Twenty different statements are included in the questionnaire. There are four different possible responses to each and every sentence, as well as four Likert scales. The choice that the pupils make reveals their understanding of the difficulties that they are facing. The students are allowed twenty minutes to respond to the twenty questions included in the questionnaire. In other words, students were given one minute to collect replies to a single item in order to complete the questionnaire. After filling out the questionnaire, students will take a written test to find out in more detail the abilities and difficulties experienced by students. The written test is to assess students' ability to describe an image in clear, organized, and detailed English, incorporating appropriate vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, and content. Students will write 5 texts based on pictures and topics determined by the researcher.

The focus of this research is to find out what difficulties students experience in writing descriptive texts. In this research, the author will use qualitative data. The data collection instrument in this research was a questionnaire and written test. The author will ask students to fill out a questionnaire containing 20 questions. Questionnaires are more useful than other forms of survey because they are less expensive, do not require as much work from the respondent as verbal or telephone surveys, and usually feature standardized responses that make it easier to obtain data. For this reason, questionnaires are more advantageous than other survey formats. When compared to other types of polls, questionnaires have many of the same difficulties in terms of question design and wording. The original Likert scale used a series of questions with four response alternatives. Researchers chose writing components based on Brown (2004). Questionnaires are more advantageous than other forms of surveys because they cost less, and they usually have standardized answers, making it easier to obtain data. For these reasons, questionnaires are more advantageous than other instruments. When compared to other types of polls, questionnaires have many of the same difficulties in terms of question design and wording. As a guideline in framing the questions on the questionnaire, the researcher chose to use the five components of writing based on Brown (2004).

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

There are 20 questions in the questionnaire that ask about common difficulties faced by students. Based on the findings, all aspects such as organization, content, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics. By knowing all the results of all aspects, researchers can decide the final results. Based on the results and findings above the final mean score for all indicators was 82, which means that the third-grade students of SMP Santa Veronika Pekanbaru felt very difficult in writing descriptive texts. Researchers analyzed that students' weaknesses in writing descriptive texts based on the questionnaire were in grammar and content. Similar to the results of the analysis based on the written test that students had done and the results were that they got the low score (poor) the most on the grammar and organization indicators. In the results of the questionnaire for all indicators, grammar and content get the same total mean score, which is 85. With this mean score, students get a very difficult category for both indicators. And for the written test, the indicator that gets the very poor criteria (10-29) is grammar with a total of 22 students or 88% of the total sample.

Students also experienced quite significant difficulties for the content indicator on the written test, the largest category was poor (30-49) which was 12 students or 48% of the total sample. Similar to the questionnaire results, this indicator is an indicator of the difficulties experienced by students in writing descriptive texts with a mean score 85 which is also included in the very difficult category. This finding has the same condition as Huda's previous research (2019), where students had difficulty in determining ideas and including the references they had in their writing. Likewise for the results of the student questionnaire on the content indicator, most students experienced difficulties according to statement 19, namely "I have difficulty in developing ideas that are in accordance with the descriptive text". The organization indicator is also an indicator of the difficulties by quite a lot of students. In the written test, 16 students got the very poor category (10-29) or around 64% of the sample. Similar to the total results of the questionnaire for the organization, the mean score for the organization was 85, which means that students feel that the organization is one of the very difficult aspects in writing descriptive text. In statement 3 in the questionnaire, there were 14 students who strongly agreed that they had difficulty connecting identification and description.

The next problem is in grammar, in the written test, 22 students were in the very poor category (10-29) or around 88% in grammar. Likewise for the results of the questionnaire, overall the total mean score of students' difficulties in grammar was 85 and was in very difficult category. And students mostly chose statement 12 "I have difficulty in understanding simple present tense" as the most difficult for them. This is the same as previous research by Nurwadiyah (2018) which stated that around 45.55% of students had difficulty in using simple present tense. Another indicator is vocabulary which is also an aspect of high difficulty for students in writing descriptive texts. In the written test, 12 students were in the less category (30-49). In the overall questionnaire, vocabulary had a total mean score of 84 which was slightly lower than the previous student difficulty indicator, but this score was still included in the very difficult category. For this indicator, the highest mean score was in sentence 5 with a mean score 85, with 14 people choosing strongly agree with the statement "I have difficulty writing descriptive texts about people, places, and things because of the limited vocabulary I have". Which most students have difficulty writing descriptive texts because of limited vocabulary. So this indicator is in the middle indicator which is difficult for students, this is similar to what Amelia (2022) stated in a previous study with 27% of students having vocabulary errors when writing descriptive texts. And the last indicator is mechanics. This indicator is an indicator that has the lowest total main score compared to other indicators. For the written test, 76% of the sample obtained a good category (70-89) on this indicator. With

the overall results of the questionnaire, mechanics obtained a total mean score of 71 which is included in the difficult category. There is only one statement in the mechanics indicator that gets a fairly high score for the level of student difficulty, namely statement 13 "I have difficulty with mechanics in writing descriptive text". However, overall mechanics is an indicator with the lowest level of difficulty experienced by students. This finding is similar to the results of previous research by Astrianingsih (2021) where mechanics is the lowest aspect of around 77% for the level of difficulty experienced by students from the five aspects in writing descriptive text.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher found that just like the previous study, students of SMP Santa Veronika Pekanbaru had similar difficulties to students from other schools that were samples of the previous study. Grammar is an indicator of the most common difficulties faced by students. After comparing the results of this study with the findings of previous studies, I continued to discuss the results with the English teacher at the school where this study was conducted. The interview results provided the teacher's perspective on the difficulties experienced by students in writing, which is in line with the results of this study. According to the teacher, the lack of interest in writing was caused by their weak mastery of basic English when entering junior high school. The teacher explained that at junior high school level, English learning materials immediately switch to more complex topics, while the basics of English that should have been mastered since elementary school are no longer taught or reinforced. As a result, students have difficulty understanding the vocabulary and grammar needed to write well. In addition, because writing skills in class are rarely the main focus compared to other skills such as reading, listening, and speaking, students become less motivated to practice writing and feel less confident in mastering them. The teacher also explained that students tend to be more interested in reading and listening skills because both skills are considered easier. In reading, students only need to understand the text, while in listening, they simply listen without having to produce language. These two skills are also more often tested through multiple-choice questions or more practical understanding compared to writing which requires more effort in organizing ideas and mastering grammar. One of the limitations of this study is the limited population and sample, only involving students from one school, so the results may not be generalizable to a wider population. In addition, this study only relies on questionnaires and written tests as data collection instruments, which may not cover all aspects of the difficulties faced by students in writing descriptive texts. This study also does not involve direct efforts or interventions to overcome the difficulties faced by students, because the focus is more on analyzing difficulties without providing treatment or solutions to reduce these problems.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to analyzed the common difficulties faced by the third grade students of SMP Santa Veronika Pekanbaru in writing descriptive text. The researcher analyzed the students' writing difficulties in two ways to get the conclusion or present the data, the researcher calculated all the scores given by the three assessors. The researchers found that the total mean score of students' difficulty in writing descriptive texts was 82, which they felt very difficult. The researcher concluded that the third grade students of SMP Santa Veronika Pekanbaru still faced significant difficulties in writing descriptive texts, especially in grammar. This was proven by the questionnaire results, which 85 as the mean score with 13 students choosing to strongly agree and 11 students agreeing that they had difficulties in using the simple present tense. For content, students' mean score was 85, and they felt very difficult in this indicator. And also for students who had difficulties in organization with 85 as the mean

score, then 84 as the students' mean score which means they felt very difficult in vocabulary. And the last one is mechanics, the students' mean score for this indicator was 71 which means students also felt very difficult in mechanics. In the written test, it also appeared that the category of third-grade students of SMP Santa Veronika Pekanbaru in writing descriptive texts was still classified as poor (44%) with 11 students in this category. Then 20% or 5 students were in the very poor category. Then for the average category there were 6 students or around 24%. And the last is the good category which was obtained by 3 students or around 12% of the research sample.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion above, there are some recommendations related to the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text:

1. Students should practice more to improve their ability in writing descriptive texts. They can start by reviewing vocabulary and grammar regularly, focusing on areas where they struggle the most. Reading materials that specifically address the indicators with higher difficulty levels can help. Watching YouTube videos explaining the use of the simple present tense in descriptive writing can also be useful. To further practice, students can try writing simple to complex sentences. Additionally, engaging in group writing activities, being open to constructive feedback, and reading more descriptive texts will help expand vocabulary and improve understanding of text structure.
2. To help students overcome difficulties in writing descriptive texts, teachers need to strengthen the basics of English by reviewing vocabulary and grammar materials. Focus more time on writing exercises and revising students' writing. Give relevant and interesting writing assignments, and use interactive learning methods such as collaborative writing or group discussions. In addition, provide constructive feedback and introduce various learning resources to enrich vocabulary and understanding of the structure of descriptive texts.
3. It would be better if the next researcher uses methods, strategies and techniques that can get definite results to conduct research. The researcher also suggests conducting research at the school where the next researcher's teaching practice is to ensure that we already know the background of our sample in advance. And the researcher hopes that this research can be used as a reference in the next research.

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