

An Analysis of EFL Students' Descriptive Writing Ability

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Abstract

This research was meant to describe students' descriptive writing abilities. The sample of this research were 25 second semester students of English education study program of IAIN Palangka Raya who were chosen using random sampling technique. This research is descriptive research. Then, a descriptive text writing test was used to measure the students' ability in writing descriptive text. Vocabulary, mechanics, and organization are the three key areas on which students' abilities to write descriptive writings are being concentrated. While the final ability of students in writing descriptive texts is categorized into five levels; very good, good, average, fair, bad. The findings revealed that the students generally had a score of 66 for writing descriptive text, which was considered to be good. Meanwhile, three components that researcher focused on in writing descriptive text; Student's vocabulary score is 77 categorized in good level, Student's mechanics score is 63 categorized in good level, and students' organization score is 63 categorized or in good level.

Keywords: Descriptive Text, Writing, Writing Ability.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk menggambarkan kemampuan mahasiswa dalam menulis teks deskriptif. Sampel dalam penelitian ini adalah 25 mahasiswa semester 2 prodi pendidikan bahasa Inggris IAIN Palangkaraya yang dipilih berdasarkan tehnik random sampling. Penelitian deskriptif ini menggambarkan kemampuan menulis teks deskriptif dengan menggunakan tes menulis teks deskriptif sebagai instrument. Terdapat tiga hal utama yang dijabarkan oleh peneliti mengenai kemampuan mahasiswa dalam menulis teks deskriptif yaitu; kosakata (*vocabulary*), mekanika penulisan (*mechanichs*) dan pengorganisasian teks deskriptif (*organization*). Sedangkan kemampuan akhir mahasiswa dalam menulis teks deskriptif dikategorikan dalam lima level yaitu; *excellent*, *good*, *average*, *fair*, dan *poor*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dalam menulis teks deskriptif secara umum mahasiswa memiliki skor 66 yang dikategorikan sebagai *good*. Sedangkan dari tiga komponen yang diteliti dalam menulis teks deskriptif; skor Kosakata (*Vocabulary*) mahasiswa adalah 77 dikategorikan dengan level *good*, skor Mekanika penulisan (*Mechanichs*) mahasiswa adalah 63 dikategorikan dengan level *good*, dan skor Pengorganisasian teks deskriptif (*Oranization*) mahasiswa adalah 63 dikategorikan dengan level *good*.

Kata Kunci : Kemampuan Menulis, Menulis, Teks Deskriptif

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I. INTRODUCTION

Receptive skills include listening and reading help students grasp language by processing its meaning. Speaking and writing, on the other hand, are components of productive skills where students must use language and create a message through or written or speech text in order to convey their concept. (Fatimah & Suharto, 2017). Writing is a process in which the writer communicates by accumulating and forming ideas, feelings, facts, or anything else that comes to mind in a legible manner. (Nunan: 2003). According to this definition, writing is the mental process of forming ideas, deciding how to convey them, and structuring them into paragraphs and sentences that a reader can understand. Brown (2001) argues that writing is a taught skill with cultural specificity. That means writing requires many practices even in the first language. Writing is important for the life of human beings because it is the frame work of their communication where they can use it for giving information, opinion, question, etc.

In Indonesia, writing regarded as one of most challenging skill to learn. Especially for the students in Indonesia because English is not their native language. Students in Indonesia are introduced and taught to some genres of text. These include recount, report, procedure, narrative and descriptive text. Students are first introduced to various text genres through the reading paradigm before being explicitly taught about the social dimensions, general structures, and language qualities. To analyze, create, and understand each genre with the proper general structure and usage of language elements depending on the genres they will write, we must first learn and recognize the differences between each genre of writing..

A descriptive text is one in which the author gives a written account of a thing, person or location. Students must think about the general structure and linguistic elements when writing descriptive texts in order to make their writing easily understandable and well presented in a clear sequence. Toendan (2016) asserts that describing a specific person, location, or item is the social role of description.

Most of the students consider writing to be one of the more difficult skills than others and many students consider that writing is a challenge. As a result, in order to support their writing, students who intend to write must possess significant knowledge. One of the numerous sorts of text in writing is descriptive text. Students frequently forget the generic structure of descriptive writings, which is an issue while they are writing them. They describe what they wish to describe right away. That being the case, the researcher decided to conduct this study on students' writing skills in general and descriptive texts in particular because many students still struggle with the art of writing.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Related Studies

The writing abilities in English descriptive texts were examined by Purnamasari, Hidayat, and Kurniawati (2021). While producing descriptive prose, there are five factors to consider: topic, structure, vocabulary, and mechanics grammar. The information gathered from the students' test on producing descriptive texts was examined using theory by Heaton. According to the results, 44% of students earned writing organization scores between average and good, while 43% of students received writing content scores between average and good. Grammar scores for 37% of students ranged from average to good; Vocabulary scores for 33% of students ranged from very good to outstanding; and writing mechanics scores for 27% of students ranged from very good to exceptional. This study also discovered that pupils had trouble producing descriptive essays. Initially, students are unable to refine their concepts. Second, the students do not know enough about the topic that will be covered. Finally, employing the simple present tense is a challenge for the kids. Agustine (2022) This study intends to identify the factors influencing first-graders at SMK Muhammadiyah Doro's challenges in composing descriptive texts. This study's findings indicated that the majority of students struggle with grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, content, and arranging. The students' environment, the teacher's teaching style, and the students' background are the other considerations.

In general of some previous studies, vocabulary, grammar, writing mechanics and the organizations of writing descriptive paragraphs were the categories that focused in the researches. Meanwhile, this study focused only on vocabulary, mechanics and organization

of descriptive text. Even though the grammar category was not explained in detail, this study still provided an explanation of how the levels of grammar ability of English study program students in writing descriptive text.

Definition of Writing

Irda, et al (2017) and Hyland (2003) Writing is a process of human activities that want to express their idea in the form of writing. Receptive talents help writing, which is a productive skill. Students who desire to generate ideas must have access to sources that support their critical thinking and receptive skills. Students who struggle to produce written language can benefit from receptive skills like reading and listening because writing can help them develop their critical thinking abilities.

Expressing oneself through writing involves thinking, feeling, and experience. According to Sakurai (2017), Maulida and Pujiati (2018), and other authors, writing is a comprehensive set of activities that a person engages in to communicate ideas to others in written form so that they may be easily understood. It implies that writing is a process by which thoughts and feelings are expressed and then transformed into written words to help the reader comprehend the author's objective.

Moreover, writing is defined by Latif (2012) and Huy (2015) as a complicated action requiring the coordination of numerous processes. Writing models have aimed to emphasize the various processes that authors engage in while generating a text. A writer must explicitly come up with ideas and consider how to put them together in a structure that makes sense. To produce a written product, writing also requires the coordination of many language abilities. Since thoughts must first be transformed into oral language before they can be represented by written symbols, oral language abilities (such as grammar, vocabulary, and morphology) are fundamental for student's writing development.

Definition of Descriptive

A descriptive work of literature is one that uses sensory elements to convey meaning to the reader. Similarly, a descriptive text paragraph is defined as a collection of closely connected sentences that all have the same main idea and are frequently used to describe someone's appearance. Many linguistic and theorists have given various definition about descriptive text. Fitriani et al., (2019), Wardani, et al (2014) and Ushchapovska, (2020) stated that an information about thing, place or person is a descriptive text.

According to the definition provided above, a text that clearly describes an object to the reader is a descriptive text. A person, place, or object is vividly portrayed in a description so that the reader may picture the subject and share the writer's experience. It can be used to enhance other types of writing or as the main method for forming an image of anything. Essentially, descriptive text gives information on the topic, the fact, and their behavior in a clear and complete explanation (Bosede and Fakaye (2016) and Urunami et al. 2017). As a result, the reader might picture and understand the text's objective content. As a result, The writers will express their emotions and have a clear comprehension of the subject being described, and the reader will be able to picture, feel, and have a basic sense of what is being read.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive methodology. The goal of this research is to learn more about the phenomenon in order to describe the current circumstances. Students from IAIN Palangka Raya's second semester were the study's population. The number of the population is about 64 students. The students are divided into two classes. Each class consists of 32 students. The smaller group of population which we actually study is called a sample (Toendan, 2017) In conducting this research, the researcher needs only one class as the sample. The class is chosen based on the cluster random sampling in order to define the sample from the defined population. Researcher used writing test as the research instrument, and used rubric or assessments criteria develop by Brown (2007), and the researcher used a classification provided by Harris (1969).

Table 1. Scoring Rubric

| No | Aspects | Score | Criteria | Weighting |
|----|--|-------|--|-----------|
| 1 | Vocabulary(V) | 4 | Effective choice of words and word form | 1.5 x |
| | | 3 | Few misuse of vocabularies, words, but not change the Meaning | |
| | | 2 | Limited range confusing words and word form | |
| | | 1 | Very poor knowledge of words, word form and not Understandable | |
| 2 | Mechanics(M) (Punctuation & Capitalization) | 4 | It uses correct punctuation and Capitalization | 1.5 x |
| | | 3 | It has occasional errors of punctuation and capitalization | |
| | | 2 | It has frequent errors of punctuation and capitalization | |
| | | 1 | It is dominated by errors of punctuation and capitalization | |
| 3 | Organization (O) - Identification - Description | 4 | Identification is complete and descriptions are arranged with proper connectives | 2x |
| | | 3 | Identification is almost complete and descriptions are arranged with almost proper connectives | |
| | | 2 | Identification is not complete and description are arranged with few misuse of connectives | |
| | | 1 | Identification is not complete and description are arranged with misuse of connectives | |

Source: Brown (2007)

Table 2. Classification Score

| | |
|----------|-----------|
| 81 – 100 | Excellent |
| 61 – 80 | Good |
| 41 – 60 | Average |
| 21 – 40 | Fair |
| 0 – 20 | Poor |

Source: Harris (1969)

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the score in the table the researcher classified 6 students got excellent score, 9 students got good score, 7 students got average score, and 3 students got fair score.

Table 3. Students Writing Scores

| No. | Samples | Score | No. | Samples | Score |
|------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <i>1</i> | Student 1 | 65 | <i>14</i> | Student 14 | 92,5 |
| <i>2</i> | Student 2 | 92,5 | <i>15</i> | Student 15 | 40 |
| <i>3</i> | Student 3 | 67,5 | <i>16</i> | Student 16 | 57,5 |
| <i>4</i> | Student 4 | 40 | <i>17</i> | Student 17 | 85 |
| <i>5</i> | Student 5 | 50 | <i>18</i> | Student 18 | 40 |
| <i>6</i> | Student 6 | 57,5 | <i>19</i> | Student 19 | 60 |
| <i>7</i> | Student 7 | 65 | <i>20</i> | Student 20 | 50 |
| <i>8</i> | Student 8 | 67,5 | <i>21</i> | Student 21 | 50 |
| <i>9</i> | Student 9 | 62,5 | <i>22</i> | Student 22 | 75 |
| <i>10</i> | Student 10 | 85 | <i>23</i> | Student 23 | 65 |
| <i>11</i> | Student 11 | 77,5 | <i>24</i> | Student 24 | 47.5 |
| <i>12</i> | Student 12 | 92,5 | <i>25</i> | Student 25 | 80 |
| <i>13</i> | Student 13 | 85 | TOTAL | | |
| | | | | | |

It can be concluded that in general the research sample got a good assessment of the level of their descriptive text writing test, because the majority got the Good, Excellent and Average levels. It is just unfortunate that there are 3 students who get a level below the average, based on research students get a level below the average is an act of plagiarism that they did when writing descriptive text.

The following is how the mean score data was calculated:

$$M = \frac{\sum f}{n}$$

M= Mean

F= Total score

n= Total sample

So the mean score would be: $M = \frac{1.650}{25} = 66$

The mean shows the students' score in producing descriptive texts. According to the classification level score analysis, the score was 66, the students' ability is at a good level. This indicates that the students are proficient at producing descriptive texts.

Vocabulary

Table 4. Vocabulary Score

| VOCABULARY SCORE | |
|-------------------------|------|
| Total Vocabulary Score | 73 |
| 100 (Maximum Score) | 100 |
| X 100 | X100 |
| = 73 | |

The students' ability to compose descriptive language centered on vocabulary was rated at 73. It was analyzed based on the skill level score; the students' vocabulary ability was at a good level. Based on this result the researcher concluded that the samples' vocabulary skills in writing descriptive paragraph were good, it is showed in their writing test, which most of them are able to use appropriate vocabulary and write it correctly, even though the researcher also found some mistakes in some vocabularies they use.

Mechanics

Table 5. Mechanics Score

| MECHANICS SCORE | |
|---|--|
| $\frac{\text{Total Mechanics Score}}{100 \text{ (Maximum Score)}} \times 100$ | $\frac{63}{100} \times 100$ = 63 |

The score of students' ability to write descriptive text focused on mechanics in this study was 63. It was analyzed based on the skill level; the students' mechanics ability was at a good level. In mechanics the results was good level with 63 points. Because indeed in writing descriptive text there are many errors in terms of mechanics, such as, many students misplace functional in writing, as well as in writing capital letters in name of places, the beginning of new sentences, name of people, city etc., there are still many capitalization errors

Organizations

Table 6. Organizations Score

| ORGANIZATIONS SCORE | |
|---|--|
| $\frac{\text{Total Organizations Score}}{100 \text{ (Maximum Score)}} \times 100$ | $\frac{63}{100} \times 100$ = 63 |

The score of students' ability to write descriptive text focused on organization in this study was 63. It was analyzed based on the skill level score as mentioned in chapter 3. The students' organization ability was at a good level. In the organization the value obtained is a good level with 63 points, inversely proportional to what was obtained by Lina (2016) with her research that used junior high school students as samples she got a slightly better score of 66. It is unfortunate that the study with second semester students of English education get a lower score than junior high school students. In the results of the study, the

researchers found that there were still many students who were still confused in writing the identification and description sections.

V. CONCLUSSION AND SUGGESTION

As stated in the introduction, the goal of this study is to describe second semester English students at IAIN Palangka Raya's proficiency in writing descriptive texts that emphasize mechanics, organization and vocabulary. The researcher wants to conclude that 25 students of second semester English students of IAIN Palangka Raya are good at writing descriptive texts. This is indicated by the test with an average score of 66. As well as a vocabulary score is 73, a mechanical score is 63 and an organizational score is 63.

Although all aspects of descriptive paragraph studied to the second semester of English education students got "good levels", the researcher felt that it was not the maximum value which meant that they were actually able to get a better score, because some of the errors found in writing descriptive paragraphs were only small things that need more attention but easy to fix. This can be helped by lecturers in writing courses so that students can pay attention to small things such as the use of capitalization and punctuation. Some other minor mistakes are vocabulary writing. Minor mistakes like this can also be minimized by not rushing in writing and re-checking as the finalization stage.

Furthermore, the error in organizing descriptive paragraphs is also something that needs to be considered, actually students already understand theoretically about descriptive text, but in practice their writing still needs a lot of improvement and practice. Especially in the Identification section, many students have not been able to write a good identification aspect, most of them immediately make the description section from the start.

Other minor problems that were not specifically explained in this study because they were not the main focus of research such as grammar were evidenced by the large number of grammatical errors in students' writing descriptive texts. Other problems such as students' interest and anxiety as evidenced by several plagiarisms found from student writing. It can also be concluded that these problems will more or less affect students' ability to write descriptive text.

The use of writing strategy is also very important in the process of writing descriptive texts, in several previous studies it has been proven that writing strategies can have a major effect on the results of someone's writing, and in the research of this thesis the researchers concluded that students have slightly minimal strategies in writing descriptive texts as seen from the results writing that should be better and in line with the level of English education study program students.

Suggestions

To improve their writing, the researcher advises the students to exercise writing sentences, paragraphs, or texts as frequently as they can. Moreover, learn a lot of grammar and vocabulary by heart to make writing easier. Students are advised to pay more attention to small things such as writing vocabulary, capitalization and punctuation, these little things that are often overlooked are actually very important in the perfection of a writing.

The researcher also advises students to make preparations before writing, such as considering writing strategies and writing frameworks. The goal is that in the writing process students are not in a hurry and lose the direction and purpose of writing a text. The use of creative thinking and imagination also has a big influence on developing the ability to write descriptive text.

However, lecturers are advised to pay more attention and help the students master the vocabulary writing, mechanics such as capitalization and punctuation & organization of identification and description aspect in writing descriptive texts. In more detail, lecturers are not only advised to pay attention to internal factors such as writing systematics, external factors such as students' interest and anxiety must also be considered, lecturers are also responsible for increasing students' interest in the process of writing descriptive text so they can use their abilities maximally. For further researchers to use this thesis as an additional reference, and hopefully could make better research to provide more specific results.

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