

STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING EFL DESCRIPTIVE TEXT

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Abstract

Writing is generally recognized as a difficult task for almost of EFL students. Indonesian students learn English as a foreign language (EFL), therefore, they have the difficulties in EFL writing text. It is not only in creating and organizing the ideas, but, they should also translating the ideas from Indonesian language to English. Analyzing students' text is very important, because it can help the English teacher know the students' difficulties in writing and also help the English teacher solve the students' problem in writing. The purposes of this study were to find out the students' difficulties and the causes of the students' difficulties in writing EFL descriptive text. By using qualitative research, the researchers got the data from documentation, questionnaire and interview. The findings describe about the students' difficulties and the causes of difficulties in writing descriptive text. In content, it could be explain that the average students' score is 15,4 or 47,4% from all students. In organization, the average score is 15,3 or 46,8% from all students. In vocabulary, the average score is 12,5 or 31,2% from all students. In grammar, the average score is 13,8 or 38% from all students. And the last in mechanic, the average score is 5,7 or 6,5% from all students. Or it can be said that the students still had the ability in the content, organization and mechanic aspects. From the analysis which had been done by the researcher, it can be concluded that the students had difficulties in grammar and vocabulary (linguistic difficulty). And the causes of the students' difficulties were they are lack of interest in learning and practice. Beside that, they are lack of knowledge about grammar, vocabulary in the EFL text.

Keywords: *EFL writing, descriptive text, students' difficulty.*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is generally recognized as a difficult task for almost of EFL students. In addition, Levin (1993) explains this phenomenon might occure because ESL and EFL students, who consider writing is difficult, do not know what and how to write, feel lack of vocabulary, fear of criticism, and want to avoid emotional confusion when they are facing a topic and blank paper.

Writing becomes the most difficult skills when it is learned by the foreign language learners. According to Brown (2001) stated that writing is thinking process, because writing is a process of

putting ideas down on paper to transform thought into words and give them structure and coherent organization.

There are many factors influencing writing to be a good one such as grammatical, vocabularies, punctuation, and spelling knowledge which must be integrated to be a text. In writing we have to produce words, phrase, sentences, and paragraph at the same time. It is a way of learning. None of us can write much of interest without first thinking, probing, observing, asking question, experimenting, and reading (Alawi, 2011: 8).

Boardman as cited by Nikmah (2011) also says that to create a good writing, a writer has to pay attention in all components of writing, for example, the topic sentences, supporting sentences, coherence, cohesion, unity, and completeness of the paragraph.

Oshima and Hogue (2007: 15-18), says that there are four steps in writing process. There are pre-writing, organizing, writing, and polishing.

One of the texts that have to be learnt in the first year students of Senior High School is descriptive text. Anderson and Kathy (1998) stated that descriptive text is a piece of text that describes living things or non-living things. Its purpose is to describe to audience the characteristics of people, things, animal and places.

The students are required to understand the component of descriptive text genre, those are: generic structure and language feature. The generic structures of this genre are identification (mention the special participant) and description (mention the part, quality, and characters of the subject being described). And for the language features of this genre, usually uses simple present tense, adjective, noun phrase and adverbial phrase.

There are some difficulties that students face during writing the descriptive text. First, the problem in developing the ideas. It means that students cannot state the ideas clearly into the text because they are lack of information related to the topic. Second, the problem in organizing the ideas to write a descriptive text. A paragraph need more than a unified point; it needs a reasonable organization or sequence. The students have to organize their ideas into good paragraph or text. It means that the students have to make their writing readable. To write a descriptive text, the students can organize their ideas by identifying the topic and give the descriptions about the topic. Third, the students find difficulties in grammar.

Grammar difficulties will influence certain patterns of how words are put together to form the correct sentences. It will make the ideas can develop well. Fourth, the students are lack of vocabulary and they also have difficulties in developing their ideas related to the topic. Some students are still in doubt with choosing the correct words while composing descriptive text. Lack of vocabulary make the students confused in developing the ideas. In this case the students have to choose correct words that they need. The last difficulty is mechanic. It is related with spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

Byrne (1988) classify the difficulties in EFL writing into three types. First is linguistic difficulty, it is the difficulty in using appropriate grammar and vocabulary. Second is psychology difficulty, it is the difficulty in developing or exploring the idea. And the last is cognitive difficulty. It is the difficulty in organization and mechanical aspects such as punctuation, capitalization, spelling and paragraphing.

Westwood (2001) divides the basic causes of students' difficulties in writing are from the students' background, they are: lack of interest, lack of practice, and learners' prior knowledge.

Analyzing students' EFL writing text is one alternative way that can be used to find out the students' knowledge in English. Analyzing students' text is very important, because it can help the English teacher know about students' difficulties in writing and also help the English teacher to solve the students' problem in writing.

There are some previous studies related to the topic about students' difficulties in writing descriptive text. Nurhayati (2016) tries to find out the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text. The technique that used to collect the data was from document, questionnaire, and interview. From the data analysis has been done by the researcher, the eight-grade students of SMPN 1 Cangkuang have difficulties in grammar and

vocabulary. And in the content, organization, and mechanical aspects students still had the ability.

The next previous study that has been done by Nikmah (2016). This study has the purpose to to analyze the students' descriptive text at MTsN Bandung in the academic year of 2015/2016. This study used descriptive quantitative method. The result of the study showed that the mean score of the students' mean score in writing descriptive text is 44 and categorized as poor. In developing ideas and mechanical aspects, the students score can be categorized as average. Then, in organization the students' score can be categorized as good. But, in the vocabulary and grammar the students' score can be categorized as poor.

The third study has been done by Hanafi (2017). The aim of this study was to find out eleventh graders' difficulties and mastery of descriptive text and the cause. The results of the study was the students find all constraint in all point of scoring. The highest percentage is 83% of students constraint in grammar. The second percentage are 80% of students have constraint in vocabulary and 80% of students have constraint in mechanic. The third percentage is 70% of students have constraint in content, and the last percentage is 67% of students have constraint in organizing. Whereas, the factor causing the students' difficulties was from their background. Many students' had difficulties because they were lack of motivate and interest in learning.

Based on some previous studies above, research about students' difficulties in EFL writing text is important to do. Because it can help the English teacher and the students in problem solving. However, the research about students' difficulties in EFL writing text is still less. So, the researcher decided to do the research related with the students' difficulties in EFL writing text especially in descriptive text.

The tenth-grade students of MA Salafiyah As-Syafi'iyah also have the difficulties in writing. It can be seen from teacher's interview that students' have difficulties in developing the idea and translating the words from Indonesian to English because their vocabulary still less. They also have difficulties in composing the correct sentences because they have limited knowledge about grammar.

From the explanation above, the researcher decided to conduct the study related with the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text. This study is conducted by using a case study at the tenth-grade students in MA Salafiyah As-Syafi'iyah in the academic year of 2017/2018. And the title of this study is "An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in EFL Writing Text (A Case Study in Writing Descriptive Text at the Tenth-Grade Students of MA Salafiyah As-Syafi'iyah in the Academic Year of 2017/2018)". Based on the background of the study above, this study has two statements of the problem as follows: (1) What are the difficulties of the tenth-grade students of MA Salafiyah As-Syafi'iyah Simorejo Kanor in the academic year of 2017/2018 in writing descriptive text? (2) What are the causes of the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text?

The objectives of the study are to find out the difficulties of the tenth-grade students of MA Salafiyah As-Syafi'iyah Simorejo Kanor in writing descriptive text and to find out the causes of the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text.

METHOD

The method of this study is qualitative method by using a case study as the research design. Emilia (2005) explains that a case study is the in-depth investigation of an individual, group, or institution, while in education, case studies were typically conducted to determine the background, environments, and characteristics of students with problem. This study uses documentation to know

the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text. The documentation is the form of the students' written text. Beside using documentation, the researcher also uses questionnaire and interview to know the causes of the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text.

The setting of this study is MA Salafiyah As-Syafi'iyah Simorejo Kanor. It is located in Simorejo village, Kanor. The researcher choosed the tenth-grade students' as the subject. But, the researcher only chooses class X-A because according to the English teacher many students in this class had low ability in writing. This class consists of 20 students; 5 males and 15 females.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the earlier chapter, the researcher had mentioned about the objectives of the study. The objectives of the study are to find out the students' difficulties and the causes of students' difficulties in writing descriptive text.

To find out the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text, the researcher choose the students' descriptive text to collect and analyze the data as document analysis based on the rubric from Tribble (1996). The types of difficulties that were implemented in analyzing the data are content, organization, vocabulary, language use (grammar), and mechanics. The content analysis was based on the ability to think creatively and develop thoughts. The organization analysis was based on the ability to write in appropriate manner. The vocabulary analysis was based on the ability to use of word/idiom. The language use or grammar was based on the ability to write with appropriate structure. The mechanics analysis was based on the ability to use punctuation, capitalization, and spelling correctly.

A. Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text

To know more about the students' difficulties, the researcher was presented the result of the students' scores and difficulties in the following table.

Table 4.1
The Data from Students' Writing Text

Aspect	Standard Scoring				
	20-17	16-12	11-8	7-5	4-0
Content	20-17	16-12	11-8	7-5	4-0
Respondents	7	9	4	-	-
Organization	20-17	16-12	11-8	7-5	4-0
Respondents	11	5	4	-	-
Vocabulary	20-17	16-12	11-8	7-5	4-0
Respondents	2	5	10	3	-
Grammar	30-24	23-18	17-10	7-5	4-0
Respondents	-	4	12	4	-
Mechanic	10-8	7-5	4-2	1-0	-
Respondents	2	10	8	-	-

Based on the table above, it could be conclude that the most common difficulties faced by students are grammar and vocabulary. Whereas, in the content, organization and mechanical aspects students was good enough to develop their written.

a. Grammar

One of the biggest difficulties that faced by students was grammar. Whereas, grammar was a main components of any language in the world, especially in English. From this study, the researcher took 20 students as the data. But, there was no student who have the highest score in this aspect. There were only 4 students who got score from 23-18 (good to average) because they did some mistakes in using grammar. Then, there were 12

students who got score from 17-10 (fair to poor) because they did frequent mistakes in using grammar. And there were 4 students who got score from 9-6 (very poor) because most of their written text was error. And the average score from students' work in this aspect is 13,8 or 38% from all students.

b. Vocabulary

The second difficulty faced by students in writing descriptive text was vocabulary. It can be seen from the table score from the students' text that most of students just got score 11-8 (fair to poor) for their vocabulary aspect because they still had limited vocabulary and did some mistakes in choosing the words. There were just 2 students who had score 20-17 (excellent to very good) because they had many vocabularies and could state appropriate words in their written text. Moreover, there were 4 students who had score 16-12 (good to average) because their vocabulary is adequate and they did few mistakes in choosing the words. And there were 3 students who had score 7-5 (very poor) because they could not choose the correct words and limited vocabulary in writing descriptive text. And the average score from students' work in this aspect is 12,5 or 31,2% from all students.

c. Content

In the content aspect, the students did not have difficulties like in grammar and vocabulary. There were 7 students got the highest score; 20-17 (excellent to very good) because they could develop the ideas clearly and relevant to the topic. There were 9 students in 16-12 score (good to average) because they could state some variety of ideas or arguments in their written text. And 4 students in 11-8 score (fair to poor) because they had

little variety of ideas or arguments in their written text. It can be said that some of the students still had abilities in developing the ideas clearly with much information. And the average score from the students' work in this aspect is 15,4 or 47,4% from all students.

d. Organization

In the organization aspect, the researcher did not found many mistakes from the students' text. There were 11 students who had 20-17 score (excellent to very good) because they could express the ideas fluently and be organized with logical sequence and the main idea is clear. Moreover, there were 4 students got score 16-12 (good to average) because in their written text the organization is not fluent, but the main idea is clear. And there were 4 students got score 11-8 (fair to poor) because the idea is not clear and difficult to follow. And the last just 2 students who got score 7-5 (very poor) because the idea is very not clear and very difficult to follow by the reader. It can be said that most of the students did not have difficulty in the organization aspect. And the average score from the students' work in this aspect is 15,3 or 46,8% from all students.

e. Mechanic

In the mechanic aspect, just 2 students who had the highest score; 10-8 (excellent to very good). Because they could demonstrate spelling, punctuation and capitalization very well. Moreover, 10 students were got score 7-5 (good to average) because they did some mistakes in spelling, punctuation and capitalization. And the last were 8 students in score 4-2 (fair to poor) because they did many mistakes in using punctuation, capitalization and did misspelling words. So, it could be

conclude that the students still had abilities in the mechanic aspect. And the average score from the students' work in this aspect is 5,7 or 6,5% from all students.

To know the causes of the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to all of students in class X-A and conducted the interview to 4 students and the English teacher.

B. The Causes of Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text

After the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the students, the next step is analyzed the result of questionnaire by used percentage technique. Based on the result of questionnaire, it can be seen that almost of the students had many problems from themselves that cause of their difficulties in writing descriptive text. There were 15 (75%) students said that they are lack of interest in learning English text especially writing descriptive text material. Then, there were 16 (80%) students said that they are lack of practice in writing descriptive text. Moreover, there were 10 students (50%) said that they are lack of knowledge about descriptive text. Then, there were 14 students (70%) still don't know about the language features of descriptive text clearly. And the last was 15 (75%) students still lack of knowledge about grammar and English vocabulary.

The result of questionnaire can be showed that most of students got the difficulties in writing descriptive text because almost of the students were lack of interest in learning English and practice to write the English text. It will be affect to their ability in writing. Moreover, most of the students also lack of vocabulary and grammar. Whereas, both of them are the basic points in learning English language. On the other hand, they were lack of knowledge about descriptive text clearly

and it also make them got difficulties in writing descriptive text.

From the students' and teacher's answer, it can be seen that the cause of the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text is most of the students lack of study and exercise to write or they feel so lazy to learn English because some students dislike this lesson or it can be said that they are lack of interest in learning English. Moreover in writing descriptive text. Beside that, the students are lack of vocabulary and grammar and it make them in writing text be difficult. And some students still do not know the generic structure and language features of descriptive text.

From the data that has got by the researcher, the most cause of the students' difficulties is they are lack of study or practice. It can be said that they are lack of interest in learning English include writing the English text. And they have the difficulties in composing the sentences into English well because they still do not know about grammar. Moreover, they cannot develop the ideas and translate into English because they are lack of vocabulary. And sometimes they still don not know about the generic structures and language features of the text.

Based on the result of document analysis, it can be concluded that the students' difficulties in writing just in the Linguistic difficulty. Byrne (1988) said that linguistic difficulty is the difficulty in using correct grammar and vocabulary. The writers face this problem because they are not mastering the grammar and vocabulary. And it make them did many mistakes in writing text because they choose inappropriate grammar and vocabulary to their writing text. As (Alfaki, 2015: 45) said that writing in the foreign language using appropriate words and grammar are the problem for the students.

According to the questionnaire and interview, most of students got the difficulties because of they were lack of interest in learning and practice to write descriptive text because they thought that writing is the difficult lesson. And it will be affect to their writing ability become less. As (Hanafi, 2017: 57) said that the most dominant cause of the students' difficulty is they are lack of interest in learning writing and it make the students think that learning writing is boring.

The next cause of the difficultiy was students lack of practice in writing descriptive text. Whereas, to make a good writing the students must take a lot of practice. Most of the students lack of practice in writing text and it make them got difficulties in writing. It is supported by Hedge (1988: 11), he said that his own experience tells him that in order to become a good writer, a student needs to write a lot. Because of that, if students want to be more quality in writing they should take a lot of practice in writing.

The third cause was learner's prior knowledge. Most of the students still lack of knowledge about English. They were lack of vocabulary and grammar and it make them got difficulties in writing. They could not composed the sentence well and developed the ideas clearly in writing descriptive text. The different structure between Indonesian and English make students got confused when they wanted to transfer their ideas into written form. According to Jacobvits in Mashullah (2015: 21), he believed that the students' prior knowledge influences the students' ability in learning a foreign language. Students who had a lot of knowledge will be easier to learn the new lesson. So that, learning vocabulary and grammar is important because both of them are basic to make good writing.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A. Conclusion

The difficulties that faced by the students was grammar and vocabulary

aspect or it can be classified as the Linguistic difficulty. Because based on the data analysis many students got the minimum score in the grammar aspect and vocabulary aspect. It can be seen from their average score is 13,8 or 38% from all students in grammar and 12,5 or 31,2% from all students in vocabulary.

Different from the three aspects such as content, organization and mechanical aspect. Its not too much trouble faced by the students. The average score in the content aspect is 15,4 or 47,4% from all students and the average score in the organization aspect is 15,3 or 46,8% from all students. And the last in the mechanical aspect the average score is 5,7 or 6,5% from all students. So, it could be conclude that the students still had ability in each of three aspects or it can be said that the students did not difficulties in Psychology and Cognitive difficulty.

Beside that, the writer found the causes of the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text from questionnaire and interview. Most of the students had difficulties in writing descriptive text because they were lack of interest in learning English because they think that English is the difficult lesson to be learned include grammar, vocabulary and the English text material. And it make them lack of knowledge and ability in EFL writing text.

B. Suggestion

The researcher found that there were some difficulties that faced by the students in writing the English text. Therefore, the researcher wants to give some suggestions.

The teachers should be increase and improve their students'

knowledge about writing composition especially in EFL writing text. Teacher should be creative to create a simple way to teach English grammar more comprehensively in order the students could understand to write easily. Then, The teacher should give more exercise in English writing text for enrich students' vocabulary, in teaching learning process to solve students' problems. And the teacher should find new method to teach the students, in order not to make them feel confused and bored when they are in the class.

The students should be learning more about grammar and vocabulary. The students should do more practice in writing text in English, for enrich their vocabulary. The students should be having motivation from teachers and other students to practice their ability in various aspect of English skills.

For the other researcher, it is hoped that the future researchers can conduct further research is similar topic with this research, so that the English teacher can take benefit from the result in this study. Moreover, other researcher could help the teacher to create a new teaching techniques in order to students enjoy learning process and they could improve their skills.

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