

EXPLORING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING A DESCRIPTIVE TEXT

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Abstract:

Writing is an ability to compose or communicate intended implication, idea, and purposes to the reader by using a clear, coherent, and well-organized paper through the process of thinking, studying, developing organizing, producing, revising, and editing the product. One of the types of writing is descriptive text. Then, students frequently faced difficulties in writing a descriptive text. Therefore, this research aimed to know the students' best and worse aspect, the students' difficulties in writing a descriptive text and the factors that caused the difficulties.

This research applied descriptive qualitative research design. The participants were 26 English students of class IIC of the English Education Department. However, only five students represented the participants to be interviewed. The instrument were students' writing product and interview. Researcher analyzed students' writing product. After that, students were interviewed with seven interview questions. Then, the results of interview were interpreted.

The results showed that students performed better in organization aspect. Then, mechanic aspect was the worse aspect that students had based on the result of analyzing students text. Students did not found big difficulties in content and organization aspect. Most students encountered difficulties in grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics aspects. Whereas, the causes of students' difficulties were students' background and teaching technique. Students were lack of motivation, were less interested, and did not understand the descriptive text well. Then, students revealed that the teaching and learning process was boring since the teacher did not provide the material creatively.

In conclusion, undergraduate students still had the difficulties and it was caused by some factors. Some suggestions were provided for students to improve their knowledge and motivation in learning, especially in writing descriptive text. For teachers, they should create more interactive media for learning. Furthermore, for the next researchers, they should analyze the strategies to overcome the students' difficulties in writing a descriptive text, and then they should conduct the research with a larger number of participants.

Key words: Students' difficulties, descriptive text, cause

INTRODUCTION

Writing is not only about skill, but it is also about how the writer can drive and develop their thoughts and ideas, as well as motivate themselves to communicate with others through writing (Kane, 2002). Moreover, Harmer (2007) stated that writing makes our thoughts visible, transforming our thoughts into print and allowing us to evolve and improve our ideas. Writing is an important skill for foreign language learners to develop when learning English. Weigle (2002) also mentioned that writing skill is extremely important for the global community's academic background, business, and personal relationships.

In the language learning process, writing is the most difficult skill that needs to be mastered. It is like what Al Fadda (2012) found out that differentiating between written and spoken words and phrases, reviewing grammar including subject-verb agreement, and joining sentences together to make a coherent paragraph are the main challenges English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students encountered. According to Ruhama and Purwaningsih (2018), it cannot be denied that writing is a complex skill because the students need to comprehend spelling, grammar, sentence, vocabulary, and structure as the units in writing.

Students frequently have many difficulties in writing. According to Byrne (1988), difficulties in writing are divided into three aspects. The first is a linguistic difficulty which included grammar, language use and choice of sentences, and also vocabulary. The second was a psychological difficulty, which focuses on the writer's

difficulties because they did not do the interaction and get feedback from the proofreader when they were writing. The last is cognitive difficulty where students got difficulty in composing ideas.

Regarding to the students' difficulties, some researchers have been carried out the research related to this research. Wardani (2018) conducted a research that involved tenth-grade students of SMK N 1 Surakarta. She found that some of the students still did not understand the generic structure of the descriptive text. The teacher might have to explain the generic structure of a text in detail before asking them to write a text. Then, the students did not have a lot of vocabulary even though the teacher let them use a dictionary, they still made a mistake in writing the right spelling. Lastly, the researcher also found that the lexicogrammatical features were the difficulties that are as crucial as spelling.

Another difficulties was found by Afifuddin (2016). This study was carried out with 25 college students as participants. The result showed that the errors the students' made most were influenced by their mother tongue, and this was the interlanguage transfer. This led to students' ignorance in mastering the rules of the structure of English for the reason. They failed in using the correct tenses, the correct forms of verbs, the correct word order and the use of articles, and they were confused in creating good sentences in English.

Ratnaningsih and Azizah (2019) also carried out research focused on students' errors in writing descriptive text. Thirty students of vocational high school became the participants. The research found that the eleventh-grade students' of SMKN 10

Jakarta did the highest errors in capitalization with 60 errors (14.67%) and the lowest typical error was run-on sentences (0.73%).

Therefore, this study aimed to explore the difficulties that students face when writing descriptive text by examining undergraduate students' texts, as previous studies did not conduct research with undergraduate students as participants. Not only that, but this research also discussed the factors that caused students' difficulties in writing descriptive text. Therefore, the researcher was interested to carry out this study to know the best and the worst aspects of writing that performed by students, difficulties in writing descriptive text faced by undergraduate students and the factors which might be the causes of the difficulties.

METHOD

This study used descriptive qualitative research because this study did not test the theory or hypothesis but explained and analyzed the real phenomena. Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). The use of descriptive qualitative research is because the purpose of this study are to know the good and worse one of writing aspects, to describe students' difficulties, and to know the factors that caused students' difficulties in writing a descriptive text. The population of this study was undergraduate students in English Department at University of Islam Malang, Indonesia. Then the researcher selected the sample of this study used purposive sampling to get certain students that were needed in this current research.

The total of participants was 26 students from class IIC in the second semester. Furthermore, the research will interview five out of 26 students responding to the students' difficulties.

The first step was analyzing the students' descriptive texts one by one. The ideas, grammar, mechanics, style, and generic structure of descriptive text would be assessed based on the scoring rubric. This study focused on students' difficulties in writing a descriptive text. The second step was calculating the percentage of students in all aspects such as content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. Then, it was classified into five categories: very good, good, fair, poor, and very poor. The categorization is based on the classification score at the University of Islam Malang. A descriptive method was purposed to describe systematically or describe a population's characteristics factually and accurately (Prasetyo & Jannah, 2008). In this step, the researcher described the result of students' text analysis and data interview. Then, the steps were data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion (Miles & Huberman in Sugiyono, 2016). Those steps were to know the students' difficulties and the factors that caused the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text.

In collecting data, the researcher first collected the students' descriptive text. Then it would be identified by the researcher with the focus questions for the analysis. After collecting the descriptive text, the researcher assessed the text to figure out what difficulties students had in writing descriptive text and to help her in adapting the questions of the interview. Secondly, the researcher applied the semi-

structured interviews using an interview guide approach. As a result, the questions given to the participants would still be in line with the data required. However, the questions were open-ended, so that the interviewees could build on their responses.

FINDINGS

- **Students' The Best and The Worse Aspects of writing**

In this research, there were 26 undergraduate students as samples to find out the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text. According to the scoring data, 19 students got very good score. Three students were categorized as a good category and four students as a fair category. It can be concluded that students mostly did not have any big difficulties, but they only found it difficult in some aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. In conclusion, students got the best perform in content aspects, and the worse aspects of writing that they faced was mechanics aspect.

- **Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text**

The result showed the students' ability in writing descriptive text. The highest score is 100 and the lowest is 61.87. It indicated that their ability is fair category. Although most of the students got high scores, they found it difficult in some aspects. Then, the table also showed all the points assessment considered to be the undergraduate students' difficulties in writing descriptive text.

After scoring students' score, the researcher calculated the percentage of students' ability. In the content aspect, the highest percentage of students' ability is excellent to very good which is 77%. In organization aspect, the highest percentage of students' ability is 96% which is excellent to very good. In the grammar aspect, students' ability is 66% which is good to average. Then, for students' mastering vocabulary, the result is really good which is excellent to average, but some students also are fair to poor in vocabulary. Finally, in mechanics aspect, the highest percentage is in two categories which are fair to poor and very poor. As a result, this study found that most students did not have difficulties in content and organization aspects. However, they found it difficult in grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. The most difficult aspect which is encountered by the students is mechanics.

After knowing the categories of students' difficulties, then, the result arranged the frequency distribution to classify the students' score. The frequency distribution score was classified into five categories: very good, good, fair, poor, and very poor. The categorization is based on the classification score at the University of Islam Malang. The categorization can be completely seen in the table below:

Table 1: Classification Score

Level of mastery ability	Categories	Grades	Weight
80-100	Very good	A	4
70-80	Good	B	3
55-70	Fair	C	2

50-55	Poor	D	1
0-50	Very poor	E	0

The table indicated that a very good category could be achieved by the students who got scores more than 80, a good category is for students who got scores 70 – 80, a fair category is for students who achieved 55 – 70, a poor category is for students who got score 50 – 55, and a very poor category is for students who got score less than 50.

- Factors Caused Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text

The causes of students' difficulties could be from several factors. According to Ismayanti and Kholid (2020), the factors were students' background, teaching technique, and students' environment. Furthermore, based on the data interview, it was found that students' background and teaching technique were the causes of English students' difficulties at the English Education Department of UNISMA.

- a. Students Background

Firstly, First was students' background. Students were lack of interest in learning writing. They said that writing is a really difficult subject because they should think many times to make a descriptive text. Then, it is also because writing took time to accomplish the text. Therefore, they were not really interested in writing. Secondly, they were also lazy to write since writing has some steps that have to be passed. Lastly, students were lack of knowledge, so that they got difficulties in generating ideas. They were also lack of grammar and vocabulary. Then, it made

them afraid to write, because they do not have enough knowledge about topics, grammar, and vocabulary.

b. Teaching Technique

Besides students' background, the factor that caused students' difficulties was teaching technique. Students also revealed that teaching and learning activities were not really interesting and tended to be boring, so they did not have the motivation to learn. They also said that it might happen because the teaching and learning activities are carried out virtually; therefore, they did not understand the materials well.

DISCUSSION

- Students' The Best and The Worse Aspects of writing

In detail, these difficulties were discussed as follows.

a. Content

In the content aspect, the previous study found the highest percentage is 47% that is fair to poor category, there are 14 students are still confused about the content what should to write. They were lack of getting ideas to write the story and only wrote in one paragraph which includes orientation, events and reorientation. There were also students who are confused about recount texts, so that they wrote inappropriate content of a recount text. In contrast, this present study found 20 students were in a very good category in the content aspect.

b. Organization

The result of previous study The highest percentage in organization aspect is 43% in good to average category, there are 13 students who got good score, 11 students

got fair to poor category and the percentage is 37%, six students got very poor category and the percentage is 20%. It could be seen, although the students who get good score are more than students in fair score, the total percentage of students which get fair to poor and very poor score are more than students who get good score. Surprisingly, in this study, only one student who got the lowest score, and 96% of students were in very good category.

c. Grammar

Comparing to the previous study that was conducted by Husna and Multazim (2019), The highest percentage in grammar aspect is 43% that is very poor category. The result of students' writing recount texts showed that most of them used present tense. Students got good score in vocabulary but in making sentences in past tense, they are still confused, such a difficulty is also faced by students in making a paragraph. It was different with the current study which found that 66% of students were in a very good category. In the grammar aspect, students were in a good to average category.

a. Vocabulary

In this aspect, students were in the average to poor category. Most students were lack of vocabulary. Therefore, they also made a short text, and they sometimes used inappropriate words. The students got difficulties in choosing appropriate words. It was different with the previous study that was conducted by Yoandita (2019) who found that in the vocabulary aspect, students also still had any mistakes, but the mistakes were not significant. For examples, student wrote "*He is cold person*". It should be "*cool*" because it referred to someone's characteristic, but "*cold*" referred to something.

b. Mechanics

In mechanic aspect, Husna and Multazim (2019) also found that the highest percentage in mechanic aspect is 50% that is fair to poor category. Most of the texts are in fair to poor score in mechanic because of their incorrect application of spelling, punctuation, capitalizations and paragraphing. This can be caused by students' writing habits that are not considered. Mechanics aspect included spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Students were in fair to poor and very poor categories. Interestingly, this present study showed that 31% of students were in fair to poor category, and also 31% of students were in very poor category. Therefore, it meant that both previous study and present study found quite same result.

- Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text

To know the students' difficulties in writing a descriptive text, the researcher carried out the interview with five students as the participants.

a. Content

Students revealed that they had difficulties in generating ideas. Then, the study discovered some students who were unable to develop their ideas well. It might be possible that they did not understand how to develop the ideas. Students said that they had learned how to make a good descriptive text, moreover; they could not success in composing it well. Most of them made mistakes in generating a topic sentence. The topic sentence of their paragraph is not perfect. There was no controlling idea in the topic sentence. According to Wali and Madani (2020), a topic sentence is divided into two parts which is a topic and the controlling idea. They also

stated that a topic introduces something that will be about, and the controlling idea is the writer's opinion about the topic.

b. Organization

Based on data interview, some students also got difficulties. It was found that students did not compose the text according to the generic structure of the descriptive text. They immediately wrote the description without explaining the identification of the topic first. Hartono (2005) pointed out that the generic structure of the descriptive text as follows. (a) Identification: it is an introduction to the subject of the description; moreover, (b) description: it is described the characteristics feature of the subject. Not only that, the students revealed that they were confused to start to write.

c. Grammar

Students said that they did many types of grammatical errors. They were confused in determining the verb for singular and plural subject. Then most of them used the inappropriate tenses. Most of the students made a sentence without a verb, did not understand singular and plural subjects, and used *to be* then followed by a verb in a sentence. Furthermore, they were confused about the use of noun and verb. It was like what Ismiyanti and Kholid (2020) found in their study that students used the wrong tenses and often made mistakes in the use of past tense and present tense.

d. Vocabulary

Comparing to the previous study that was carried out by Yoandita (2019), she found that students had many poor choice of words. Surprisingly, many students still used Bahasa Indonesia in writing the descriptive text. It was different with the finding of this current study. All of students used full English in writing. However, they still

have big difficulties in vocabulary. Students were lack of vocabulary. Sometimes, they used the synonym of word which was not appropriate with the context.

e. Mechanics

It was quite interesting if it was compared to the previous study. Yoandita (2019) found that there was no significant difficulties in mechanic aspect. However, Ismiyanti and Kholiq (2020) found a different result. They found that students made errors in spelling; for instance, they wrote “*fery*”, and it should be changed into “*very*”. However, this current research found that students frequently made some errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Based on data interview, they revealed that sometimes they were confused in placing punctuation. Then, they made mistakes in spelling without checking it whether it was correct or not. Not only that, the students also did not know the use of capitalization. It could be seen based on the examples of students’ error in their writing descriptive text. It obviously showed that students highly faced difficulties in vocabulary aspect.

- Factors Caused Students’ Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text

 ` The previous study that was conducted by Ismiyanti and Kholiq (2020) found the factors that caused students difficulties was students self-motivation, their learning interest, their background knowledge about descriptive text. However, this study found a different result. The data interview showed that students’ difficulties were caused by their background and teaching technique. Firstly, they were lack of interest in learning English. Students were less interested to write. It was because writing had several steps that have to complete such as pre-writing, organizing, writing, and revising and editing (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Therefore, they said that

writing was hard to be mastered, and it made them lazy and afraid to write. Besides, they also had no motivation then they said that writing is boring. It is also stated by Lestari (2020) who said that motivation is the important aspect where it determines students to get success in second language learning, so the students who do not have a lot of motivation will get difficulty in learning writing. Secondly, students were lack of proficiency in writing skill was one of the factors that caused students' difficulties in writing descriptive text. Students did not have more knowledge about writing skill. Then, they also did not understand grammar, had limited vocabulary, and made error spellings. It might be caused by some aspects. According to Erlangga et al. (2019), three aspects that caused students' difficulties were carelessness, first language interference, and translation. Furthermore, it could be concluded that lack of proficiency in writing was the cause of the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text.

Besides students' background, another factor was teaching technique. The researcher found that teaching technique also became the cause of students' difficulties in writing descriptive text. Students found it difficult in writing descriptive text because of the teaching technique. They revealed that they were boring during learning because the teaching and learning process was not interesting. It was also supported by Moses and Mohamad (2019) who stated that it is not because of students' naughtiness, but sometimes the students are not interested in learning writing. Students revealed that there were no interesting learning media. Then, at the end of the interview, they also stated that it might happen because of the virtual teaching and learning process, so they could not engage more.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

it can be concluded that students' best aspect of writing was organization aspect, and their worse aspect was mechanics. Then, most of them did not find any big difficulties in content and organization aspects, but they frequently faced the difficulties in grammar, vocabulary, and mechanic aspects. Lastly, students difficulties in writing a descriptive text were caused by their background and teaching technique. It was suggested that students have to improve their knowledge about grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, read more so that they will have more ideas to be written, and they should focus and pay more attention when teaching and learning process is ongoing. For the teachers, they should be more creative in learning to attract students' interest in learning, then teacher has to provide the appropriate media to help the students' in understanding the material. Finally, for the next researchers who want to carry out the same research, they should analyze the ways and strategies to overcome the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text.

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