

THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED AND STRATEGIES USED BY THE STUDENTS IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXT

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Abstract: Descriptive text is a crucial text that must be learned by the students.

This article aims at knowing the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text and the strategies that used by the students to overcome their difficulties in writing descriptive text. The population of this research was the second semester students of English Departemtn at University of Islam Malang. The participants consisted of 34 students. In collecting the data, the researcher used questionnaire as the instrument that covered the difficulties and strategies in writing descriptive text. The finding of this research showed that the students' biggest problems in writing descriptive text were lack of vocabulary, poor grammar knowledge, organizing idea, developing idea, and generic structure. To overcome these problems, there are some strategies used by the students in writing descriptive text included decide a topic before writing, use a dictionary to chek vocabulary, make an outline, revise a sentence, and share writing with one another.

Key Words: *Students' Difficulties and Strategies, Writing, Descriptive Text*

INTRODUCTION

In education, English is certainly taught as a compulsory subject in junior high school. The students learn both basic components and English skills. These English skills include listening, reading, writing and speaking. All these skills are very important, but learning writing is a crucial skill that must be learned by the students. Harmer (2004) said that writing is one of the crucial language learning

skills beside speaking, listening, and reading. It means that students must prioritize writing as the important skill to learn. Writing is one way of expressing opinions, ideas, observations and feelings. Siahaan (2013) claimed that writing plays a vital role for students who are studying a language in the process. Every student needs to learn writing, communicate for professional or academic reasons, and particularly for the students they need to learn writing skill to connect with others and prepare for the final academic assignment and their future requirement. Also Nasser (2018) stated that writing is used as a language learning resource and it is considered a crucial skill in daily life as well as basic type of foreign language teaching. In addition, mastering the writing skill of secondary school is a critical task. This may be because strong writing skills are important for academic performance and requirements for many jobs and careers.

Regarding students' problems in writing, they may get difficulties in writing an English text since English is not their first language. In writing, there are some problems encountered by the students related to the some researches. This problem certainly becomes an important thing to be solved by the students so that the students can feel easier to write. Nurhayati (2016), as cited in Ningsih (2016) stated that some other problems identified in teaching and learning writing are: problems with writing include lack of ideas, organization of point, rhetoric or thinking patterns, cohesion and coherence.

To overcome some problems in writing, students should use the successful strategies if they want to create a great writing. O'Malley (1996, p.149) explained that here are some strategies that can be applied by the students to overcome the difficulties in writing. There are some strategies that can be used by the students in writing include decide a topic before writing, make an outline, revise a sentence, and share writing with one another.

According to Indonesia curricula (2004), "there are several forms of the text that should be mastered in English subject by the 10th grade; they are Report, Narration, Procedural, News Item and Descriptive." From these types of text, descriptive text is one of the texts that must be mastered by the students in learning English".

Descriptive text is a text which describes a certain person, place, animal or thing that its function gives the reader clear information about something described. Husna, Zainil & Rozimela (2013) revealed that a descriptive text is a content that a writer tries to imagine what she/he is describing. Definition is used to identify something, location or person in question. Keraf (2000) argued that descriptive text is a text where the writer mentions illustrations, the feeling that the writer felt in conveying the image, feelings, and experience to the readers to allow them to imagine, or as if they were also engaged in doing so. It must be described clearly so that the readers can understand the content of the text. Students, however, make clear explanations so that the reader can picture the entity that the students identify in their class.

Based on the background above the research conduct the research aim is to answer 2 research questions:

1. What are the English students' difficulties in writing descriptive text?
2. What are the English students' strategies to overcome their difficulties in writing descriptive text?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

a. Writing

Writing is a process in transferring ideas, opinions, and feelings through writing activity. Then, Pratiwi (2012) stating that writing is one way of communicating thoughts, perceptions and feelings in written form. Through writing activity, it really helps students to transfer their thoughts.

b. Descriptive Text

Anisa & Marlina (2014, p. 171) stated that descriptive text is a short of text that presents something's characteristics to give a clear information of a person, location, object or event. The schematic structure of Descriptive text is divided into two: Identification and Description. Besides schematic structure, descriptive text also has its own linguistic features. Linguistic features of descriptive text are: use specific participant, written in present tense, use linking verbs, use adjectives, use relational and material processes.

c. Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text

Husna, Zainil & Rozimela (2013) defined that students' writing difficulties are three points. First, students' problem in developing idea. When students write one paragraph, several students wrote several principal ideas; the aim of the article was still unclear. It is also noticed that certain paragraphs were written in only one sentence and it was not yet clear. Second, students' problem organizing idea. When students write, students organize their ideas to write a short paragraph by describing the subject and providing the details about the subject. Third, students' problem in grammar. When the students arranged the sentences, the students still felt confused and limited knowledge of grammar structure, especially in subject-verb-agreement. Fourth, the students' problems in lack of vocabulary. Lack of vocabulary led the students to become lost in their ideas. In this case, the students must choose the right terms they need. The last problem is problem in spelling, punctuation and capitalization. These problems affect the meaning of the sentences in a paragraph; they also confused the reader about the contiguity nature of the sentences also in the article.

d. Strategies in Writing Descriptive Text

O'Malley (1996, p.149), as cited in Kusumawaty (2017) divided writing strategies into two part, pre-writing strategies and writing strategies.

1. Pre-writing strategies

Pre-writing strategies means a strategies used by the students before writing the points, it includes decide a topic before writing and making an outline. Decide a topic means the students must have a certain topic before writing. And make an outline means a framework of writing that is arranged systematically.

2. Writing strategies

Writing strategies means strategies used by the students during writing, it includes editing words/sentences, revising sentences, and sharing writing with others. Revising sentence means to observe the

mistakes that had done during writing. And sharing means the student couple exchange thoughts with a larger group, such as the entire class. The students also present their ideas more comfortably.

e. Previous Study

The researcher has found some previous studies that related with this research. The first study was conducted by Yoandita (2019). The title is "*An Analysis of Students' Ability and Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text*". The researcher used descriptive research as the research design. The instruments of this research are observation, questionnaire and students' text. The results of this research showed that there are some problems in writing descriptive text that faced by the grade students of vocational high school in Cianjur. The biggest students' difficulties in writing descriptive text are in developing idea and in organizing idea. It is because all students write few paragraphs. Besides that, in grammar context, vocabulary and mechanics also still any mistakes, but the mistakes are not significant. If they often practice to write English text, their writing skill will increase.

The second previous study was conducted by Putri (2018) entitled "*The Difficulties of Writing Descriptive Paragraph Faced by the Eight Grade Students At SMP N Kota Jambi*". In this research, the researcher used qualitative research. The instrument of this research is interview for gaining the data from the participants. The findings of this research showed that there were some difficulties that faced by the students in writing descriptive paragraph. Among of them are lack of vocabulary, confused to differentiate between physical appearance and personality, grammar and difficulties to find new ideas. For the factors, the factor does not just come from themselves, environmental factors like noisy classroom atmosphere, and the factor of how teachers can also influence students in learning.

From this two previous studies above, the research was different because this research was conducted to the second semester of English department students at University of Islam Malang. In this research, the researcher used qualitative research as research design and the researcher

used a questionnaire to collect the data from the participants. In addition, beside the researcher focused on students' difficulties, the researcher also focused on the students' strategies in writing descriptive text.

METHOD

This research aims to investigate the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text and their strategies to overcome their difficulties. Therefore, the researcher used qualitative research as the research design. Latief (2017) explained that qualitative research is an investigative process focused on understanding human behavior by constructing complex, holistic pictures of the social and cultural settings in which such behavior. This research design was used to get the crucial information the difficulties faced by the students in writing descriptive text. Moreover, this research design also can explore the strategies that used by the students to overcome their difficulties in writing descriptive text.

The participants of this research were the second English students of English Departement at University of Islam Malang. In this research, the researcher took 34 students as the participant from class A and C because they had learn about descriptive text so the researcher wanted to find out the deeper informations about the difficulties encountered and strategies used by the students during writing descriptive text.

In this research, the researcher used only a questionnaire as the instrument of the research. The questionnaire was used for collecting the research in investigating and knowing the students' difficulties and strategies in writing descriptive text. In this research, the way how the researcher collect the data is the researcher asked permission to the lecturer, then share the link of questionnaire to the students through online. After that, before the students fill out the questionnaire, the researcher explained about the questionnaire and gives them a clear instruction to do it.

After completing all the data from the questionnaire, then the researcher analyzed the data. The qualitative analysis used three steps; data reduction, data display, and drawing a conclusion (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Data reduction; the researcher took all most information from raw data included from the questionnaire from the students. Then, the researcher selected important information and omit irrelevant data.

Data display; after the data being reduced, the researcher displayed the data and explained the main important detail information that had been being selected before writing down in the text. It focused on investigating on students' difficulties and strategies in writing descriptive text.

Drawing conclusion; this is the last step of the research. After knowing and narrating facts the researcher utilize the draw the conclusion, the researcher ensured that the data display was valid to get the accurate conclusions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this research is to investigate the difficulties encountered and strategies used by the students in writing descriptive text. This research used questionnaire to collect the data regarding students' difficulties and strategies in writing. The questionnaire was done with 34 students of second semester students of English Department as the participant and the questionnaire consisted of 20 questions that covered the difficulties and strategies in writing descriptive text. The questionnaire was conducted by using English and Bahasa so that the participants understand about the questions.

From the results of the research questionnaire conducted, the researcher found the biggest problems faced by the students in writing descriptive text and some strategies used by the students to overcome their difficulties in writing descriptive text. The biggest problems were lack of vocabulary, poor grammar knowledge, organizing idea, developing idea, finding new idea and getting and generating idea. For the strategies, there are some strategies used by the students in writing descriptive text were decide a topic before writing, make an outline, revise a sentence, and share writing with one another.

a. Difficulties Faced by the students in Writing Descriptive Text

1. Lack of Vocabulary

The result showed that there were 26 students who said yes with the percentage 76.5 % and 8 students said no with the percentage 23.5 %. It was

caused by the students did not know and have many vocabularies so that the students were difficult to write the sentences. Gunning (2002) explained that limited knowledge of vocabulary will be the biggest concern of language learning. This problem occurred due to the students' lack of vocabulary so students cannot make a good sentence.

2. Poor Grammar Knowledge

The result shows that there were 24 students who said yes with the percentage 70.6 % and 10 students said no with the percentage 29.4 %. Most students found difficulty in grammar knowledge when the students arranged the sentences because the students still felt confused and limited knowledge of grammar structure. Husna, et.al (2013) stated that grammar is difficult because the students do not learn structures in one time and also grammatical problems may affect some patterns of how words are assembled to form the right sentences.

3. Organizing Idea

The result showed that there were 21 students who said yes with the percentage 61.8 % and 13 students said no with the percentage 38.2 %. This problem was caused by the placement of the ideas was still disorganized and unclear from one sentence to another. It could not produce a good and clear sentence. Husna, et.al (2013) explained that students had trouble coordinating ideas because they did not know how to express them in English. Most of the students struggled to arrange the text well. It was related to the use of coherence in descriptive writing.

4. Developing Idea

The result showed that there were 19 students who said yes with the percentage 55.9 % and 15 students said no with the percentage 44.1 %. This problem was caused by the students have limited ideas related to the topic, so the students could not continue to write next sentences. Kartika and Saun (2013) stated that the students are often confused when using noun phrase which is used in writing descriptive writing. Unclear and insufficient ideas also were the reasons why students could not develop their ideas in writing. This problem impacts the result of students' descriptive text.

5. Generic Structure

The result showed that there were 15 students who said yes with the percentage 44.1 % and 19 students said no with the percentage 55.9 %. This problem was caused by the students still could not describe the qualities and characteristics of thing and person well. This problem will interrupt their focus in writing. Nica, Perpisa & Sevrika (2015) explained that generic structure also makes students difficult in writing because the students had trouble writing paragraph when composing in descriptive text. In the description, the students did not know and understand what they would write. The students also did not explain the general information of their knowledge was based on the subject.

b. Strategies Used by the students in Writing Descriptive Text

1. Decide a topic

The result showed that there were 32 students who said yes with the percentage 94.1 % and 2 students said no with the percentage 5.9 %. Decide a topic is one of the strategies that the students think is good because it will make the students easier to write. Faraj (2018) said that the more students are interested in their own subject, the more the students are able to connect the sentences, so they choose the subject they feel interested about. It means that this is one of the crucial strategies in writing descriptive text.

2. Strategy to use a dictionary to check some vocabularies

The result showed that there were 31 students who said yes with the percentage 91.2 % and 3 students said no with the percentage 8.8 %. This strategy that used by the students was one of the strategy in overcoming the lack of vocabulary that the students did not know in writing descriptive text. By using dictionary, the students can find many vocabularies that the students really need for the text. Kondal (2018) argued that the dictionary can be a valuable resource for students, if they use the dictionary. To know how to use it effectively in the sense of learning. Teaching the correct use of the

dictionary will allow learners to understand to choose the right terms in the specific setting.

3. Make an outline

The result showed that there were 21 students who said yes with the percentage 61.8 % and 13 students said no with the percentage 38.2 %. An outline helps students easier to write based on the framework of ideas that the students arranged systematically, clearly and regularly. Faraj (2015) explained that students begin writing an outline for their subject after organizing the collected ideas and having enough information about how to compose the theme sentences. Then, the students learn how to make their writing outline.

4. Revise a sentence

The result showed that there were 25 students who said yes with the percentage 73.5 % and 9 students said no with the percentage 26.5% in revising the sentence as the strategy. This step was very important for students because it is the way how the students produce a good writing by paying attention to repair the mistakes that have done during writing. Faraj (2018) stated that the process of revising sentences has two self-review activities and the writing comment by the teacher and students. With that, students must reread their work by themselves in self-revision.

5. Share writing with others

The result of the questionnaire showed that there were 13 students who said yes with the percentage 38.2 % and 21 students said no with the percentage 61.8 %. This strategy usually used by the students after they write sentences. The students will check the result of writing each other, and then they will give the feedback of the mistakes each other too. Siburian (2013) stated that share means the student couple exchange thought with a larger group, such as the entire class. The students also present their ideas more comfortably. Certainly, the students will get the correction after their friend checking the text.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study was to find out the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text and to describe the students' strategies in writing descriptive text. The research design of this research was Descriptive Qualitative Research. The study was conducted to the second semesters students of English Department at University of Islam Malang. The instrument used in this research was questionnaire. There are 11 questions about the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text and there are 9 questions about the students' strategies to overcome the difficulties in writing descriptive text.

Based on the results from findings, the researcher finds some students' difficulties in writing descriptive text. The researcher concludes that the students' problems in writing descriptive text are developing the ideas, organizing ideas, poor grammar knowledge, lack of vocabulary, and generic structure. It can be seen from the result of the results of findings. While the students' strategies to overcome their difficulties in writing descriptive text are deciding a topic before writing, making an outline, using dictionary to check vocabulary, revising sentences, and the last is sharing writing with friend. These strategies can be proved from the results of the findings.

SUGGESTIONS

From the explanations, there are some general points to be recommended regarding students' problems and strategies in writing descriptive text. Those some suggestions will be helpful recommendation for English lecturer, students and other researchers as follows:

For the Future Researchers

Regarding to the limitation of present research, it will be better for the future researchers to conduct the same research topic by using more than one instrument to know another problems encountered and strategies used by the students in writing descriptive text because in this research, the researcher only uses one instrument.

For the Teachers

The English teacher should give a clear explanation on how to write good descriptive text to the students and give more examples to the students to make them understand the descriptive text so that the students can understand the material clearly. The teacher also should give motivation and attention to their English writing so that they have strong spirit and ambition to learn descriptive text.

For the Students

The students can use the results of this study to overcome their difficulties in learning vocabulary, apply the various strategies found in this research in order to help them in writing descriptive text and the students also should be more active in teaching and learning process; ask the teacher about the particular aspects in descriptive that they do not know and understand.

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