

STUDENTS' ENGLISH DESCRIPTIVE WRITING PERFORMANCE IN SMP NEGERI 26 MAKASSAR

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the students' range level and the problems encountered by students' in their English writing performance at the 1st grade of SMP Negeri 26 Makassar. This study used the explanatory sequential mixed method with purposive sampling. The sample of this research are 30 students from the VII-1 grade. The research instrument used was a writing test to determine the range level of students' writing performance abilities and interviews as a support to find out what were the problems that students faced in writing descriptive texts in English. The results of the data analysis showed that the total average score of students' writing descriptive text writing performance was 68.23 which was in a good category, and the results of the interviews showed that students still had difficulties, especially in the vocabulary aspect which was influenced by the use of google translate. Thus, it can be concluded that the problems encountered by students in their performance of writing descriptive texts in English still have weaknesses, especially in the use of punctuation and writing spelling in the mechanics component.

Keywords: *writing performance, descriptive text, SMP Negeri 26 Makassar*

INTRODUCTION

English writing is a very important language learning skill that is very important to master. The ability to write is not only learned in school, but this ability will continue into the world of work and beyond. Therefore, it is necessary to teach and train students' writing skills early so they can develop their skills in putting thoughts into words. In addition, writing can also train the writer's critical thinking skills so that the meaning of the presented writing can be conveyed well to the reader. That way, students will begin to be provoked in learning the word for word, composing complex sentences, and building ways and patterns of thinking in writing. Writing skills require a well-structured way to present thoughts in an organized and planned manner (Braine and Yorozu, 1998).

According to (Kellogg, 2008), students who are often trained to write and correct texts can strengthen their grammatical structures, increase their vocabulary, and help with other language skills such as reading, listening, and speaking. In this case, students can also see the advantages of mastering writing skills; namely, the students can measure the development of the language being studied because they can express ideas or imaginations that students have to explore their abilities through writing skills further.

Sometimes, students have difficulty in mastering writing skills because they are not familiar with things related to writing. Some factors cause it because the written spelling differs from how

it is pronounced orally. So students are sometimes confused or have errors when writing in English, which is also influenced by a lack of vocabulary knowledge.

In compiling writing, students need to pay attention to how they must be able to express their writing by choosing good words, and using correct vocabulary, mechanics, grammar, and organization, especially in foreign languages. This is important for students to pay attention to because this is the basics of writing to achieve the target of mastering students' writing skills, especially in English.

In this case, with technology development, students at the 1st grade level at SMP Negeri 26 Makassar also carry out English language learning with the help of digital translation technology. So, it is fascinating for the researcher to find out how the students' writing performance at SMP Negeri 26 Makassar if they are given a writing test without the help of translation technology, considering that English lessons are still very new for junior high school students today.

In addition to students' interests at the junior high school level, the researcher is still researching deficiencies or problems in writing descriptive texts in English that are still faced by students, especially at the 1st grade of junior high school students'. The novelty of this study lies in the formulation of the problem to be studied by the researcher, namely finding out the level of writing ability of junior high school students in English and also whether or not there is a problem found or still faced by students when the writing test is carried out in English. The writing test was certainly not use the help of automatic translation technology, which would make the research results more transparent. In addition, this study was also examine the components of students' writing performance in English, especially in mechanics, vocabulary, grammar, text contents, and organization. It is interesting because sometimes students pay less attention to the mechanics in writing; in English, the spoken spelling will be written differently from the written spelling.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Writing

Writing is included in the category of productive skills; in this category, students need to construct words into a sentence and then a paragraph into a written form that is produced. From this, (Daniels and Bright, 1996) argue that writing is a medium that acts as a symbol that can represent the author's expression and must be clear to the reader without any interference from other writers so that the writing done has its characteristics for each individual. This means that a writer has their characteristic in expressing their writing, so the writer knows how to convey the message in their way. This can also be a characteristic or thought issued by the writer to create the writer's idea that other authors cannot plagiarize, or it can also be to avoid plagiarism. By practicing writing skills regularly, the writer can understand and recognize the structure of the writing style properly and correctly by themselves.

The main goal of learning English for students is to master language learning competencies, including knowledge and skills that are indicators of the learner's success (Visakha, 2019). Writing is one of the essential language skills to be mastered by students. This is because writing skills are language skills that require a lot of experience, time, and practice to achieve successful language learning. From the previous opinion, it can be concluded that writing can also aim to train students to develop knowledge and skills in English gradually.

Components in Writing

In the assessment of writing skills, the teacher must consider five assessment criteria (Brown, 2003), namely the organization of the text, the content of the text, the vocabulary used, and the

preparation of sentences with proper grammar and proper grammar spelling. Therefore, word choice, spelling, grammatical regularity, and the suitability of the text content with the writing context also influence achieving a good level of writing.

1. Mechanics;

Mechanics in writing is not only learning about how the letters are arranged, which will form a word, but in mechanics the writer also learning about symbols that can help the writer understand about the meaning of the word to be presented. Therefore, students need to know the correct spelling and the meaning of the words to be written so that there is no miscommunication and the context conveyed is also appropriate.

2. Vocabulary;

Without vocabulary knowledge, no sentences will be formed, and there will be no communication. In this regard, (Staehr, 2008) argues that vocabulary knowledge has a more favorable contribution to reading and writing skills and is moderately related to speaking and listening skills. In addition, vocabulary knowledge can also help humans develop their knowledge further so that the knowledge obtained can develop widely. Therefore, knowing vocabulary is very important in survival and science.

3. Grammar;

In compiling a sentence, it is necessary to know how the grammar rules are excellent and correct, which will be the foundation of the sentence itself. However, a basic grammatical arrangement can also be arranged into subject, verb, and object or (SVO) by creating a complete thought of the sentences themselves.

4. Text Contents;

A well-written work can be judged by how the author compose or make an outline of the writing to be made, presents word for word or sentences that have meaning, and follow the context of the writing presented. The context of an article can also produce a message from the writing conveyed. The proper context can be a reference for writers to develop their writings to a broader range.

5. Organization.

The thing that writers need to know about the organization in writing is that in general writing can be divided into three parts, namely the introduction of the text, the body of the text, and the conclusion of the text. In the introduction of the text, the writer needs to introduce to the reader what or who will be the object of the text to be presented. Next, namely in the body of the text, the writer begins to describe the characteristics of the object being written. And in the last part, namely the conclusion of the text, the writer needs to explain the essence or outline of the object that has been written. In organizing writing, the writer needs to pay attention to every transition from one sentence to another so that the writer can develop their ideas properly and the reader will not be confused with the writing that has been presented.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research used the explanatory sequential mixed-method, that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods in one study with the same variables, at the other side (Creswell, 2010) argues that the sequential explanatory strategy in research is a strategy that has a sequence of collecting and analyzing quantitative data first, which followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data which is built on the results of quantitative data.

Based on the explanation above, this research combines two research methods simultaneously: quantitative and qualitative. As for the quantitative method, the instrument used by the researcher is the form of a written test. While in the qualitative method, the researcher uses the instrument in the form of an interview.

Time and Location of the Research

The research located in SMP Negeri 26 Makassar at PU Mallengkeri Complex on Jl. Traktor IV No.21, Mangasa, Kec. Tamalate, Kota Makassar, South Sulawesi 90221. The implementation of this research carried out in a day on February in the 2022/2023 academic year.

Population and Sample

The population in this study were the seventh-grade students which consist of 8 classes in an even semester, and totaling 237 students in the academic year 2022/2023. As for this research, the sampling technique that the researcher used is the purposive sampling technique. In this technique, the respondents selected as a sample are 30 students from the 1st grade, specifically at class VII-1 of the SMP Negeri 26 Makassar because the class VII-1 contains students who have good grades or selected students.

Research Instruments

In this study, the instrument that used by the researcher in collecting data from the respondents are writing test and interview that designed by the researcher herself. The writing test that the researcher used in this study aims to determine the extent to that the performance of students' English writing skills measures in terms of mechanics, vocabulary, grammar, text contents, and organization. Next, the interview instrument has a goal for the researcher to find out what problems were encountered that found based on the results of previous research instruments that support the researcher's statement.

Technique of Data Analysis

In this study, the researcher analyzes the data using the scoring rubric through a descriptive writing test to measure the English writing performance of 1st grade on junior high school students. Next, an interview been conducted to obtain data that will strengthen the previous instrument, namely writing test.

- a. In this study, the researcher analyzes the data using the scoring rubric through a descriptive writing test to measure the English writing performance of 1st grade junior high school students. In processing the data, the researcher uses an assessment rubric adapted from the scoring rubric writing which adapted from (Jacobs et al., 1981).

Table 1 Scoring Rubric

No.	Categories	Score	Description
1.	Content	30-27	Excellent to Very good
		26-22	Good to Average
		21-17	Fair to Poor
		16-13	Very poor
2.	Organization	20-18	Excellent to Very good
		17-14	Good to Average
		13-10	Fair to Poor
		9-7	Very poor
3.	Vocabulary	20-18	Excellent to Very good
		17-14	Good to Average
		13-10	Fair to Poor
		9-7	Very poor
4.	Grammar	25-22	Excellent to Very good
		21-18	Good to Average
		17-11	Fair to Poor
		10-5	Very poor
5.	Mechanics	5	Excellent to Very good
		4	Good to Average
		3	Fair to Poor
		2	Very poor

- b. In this study, an interview been conducted to obtain data that will strengthen the previous instrument, namely writing test. This analysis aims to measure and describe events that occur fairly and accurately regarding any facts or actual events that occur during the research conducted at SMP Negeri 26 Makassar.

1. Data Reduction;

At the data reduction stage, the researcher needs to read the results of the raw data repeatedly that has been obtained carefully and then begin to summarize and sort out data that is more focused or follow the research and discard data that is not appropriate.

2. Data Display;

After the data is reduced, the next step is to display the data. Through the data display step, the researcher can easily be more selective in elaborating and compiling complex data into simpler forms and easier to understand later in the conclusion.

3. Conclusion Drawing.

Furthermore, the researcher can conclude if the data that has been found or collected is valid by solid evidence and can be used as a reference to answer the formulation of the problem sought.

FINDINGS

Students' English Writing Performance Level

Data regarding students' English writing performance was obtained through a test of writing descriptive text in English. To identify the level of 1st grade students' English writing skills through an assessment of 5 components, including text contents, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics in students' performance to write descriptive texts in English.

Table 2 Category and Mean Scores of Each Writing Components

Writing Components	Contents	Organization	Vocabulary	Grammar	Mechanics
Total	632	439	406	486	84
Mean	21.06	14.63	13.53	16.2	2.8
Categories	Fair to Poor	Good to Average	Fair to Poor	Fair to Poor	Very Poor

It can be seen that the result of students' performance in descriptive writing at the junior high school level through the total score of each component in writing and the average from the calculation of the number of scores that have been obtained. The five components in writing used as assessments are text contents, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. In the first component, namely text contents, the total score obtained from all students was 632 with the average 21,06 in "fair to poor" predicate. Furthermore, in the organization category, the total score obtained was 439 with the average 14,63 in "good to average" predicate. Next, in the vocabulary category, the total score obtained by students was 406 with the average 13,53 in "fair to poor" predicate. More, in the grammar category, the total score obtained by students was 486 with the average 16,2 in "fair to poor" predicate. And the last, in the mechanics' category, the total score obtained by students was 84 with the average 2,8 in "very poor" predicate.

Problems Encountered in Students' English Writing Performance

Based on the results of the interview, the researcher has found several problems encountered in the performance of descriptive writing text that has been faced by students, namely; (1) duration in writing production, (2) the use of Google Translate, and (3) the difficulty in writing.

a. Duration in Writing Production;

Extract:
 S2: Yes, enough.
 S3: Yes, it is enough.
 S4: It's enough.
 S11: I think 30 minutes is enough.

It can be seen from the students' answers in the interview above, which provide information that the duration of 30 minutes is sufficient and ideal time for students to complete the descriptive text task that has been given by the researcher.

b. The Use of Google Translate;

Extract:

S1: Not really often, because I have learned English since elementary school.

S4: Sometimes, only for few words that not similar, but for the similar words usually not using google.

S6: Sometimes the help of google translate is useful when a translating task given in a paragraph.

S12: Depends, sometimes the teacher gives permission to use google translate but sometimes the teacher helps to translate some words.

Based on the students' answers from the interview results above, it appears that on average, students still use Google Translate as a tool for translating in learning English, although some of them only use it occasionally on a few words they don't know. Apart from using Google Translate, students are also facilitated with the help of translations from teachers who teach in class.

c. Difficulty in Writing.

Extract:

S2: Sometimes, there are some words in English that I want to write but I don't know how the writing form in English so I switch to the words to another similar.

S4: For me, the difficulty in writing is because there are some words that I never learned before and I am not similar.

S11: The difficulty is because I am not good enough in English and this is made me take a very long time to think about the words that I want to write, so sometimes I choose the easier words that I already knew.

Based on the results of the interviews described above, it can be seen that most of them experienced difficulties when completing the descriptive text assignments given. And also, the data from the interviews showed that almost all students found it difficult because of a lack of knowledge of vocabulary or not yet similar to some of the new vocabulary they wanted to use, so they replaced it with another vocabulary that is close to the vocabulary they wanted to use before.

DISCUSSION

Students' English Writing Performance Level

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen that only the organizational component received the good to average category. Furthermore, the contents, vocabulary and grammar components get the fair to poor category. And finally in the mechanics category which got the very poor category. In this way, this also agrees with (Javed et al., 2013) who found that secondary school students in Pakistan made quite serious errors in writing components which included spelling, sentence structure, tense, punctuation and paragraph structure. This is also in line with the phenomenon that occurs in 1st grade students at SMP Negeri 26 Makassar where the results of the findings also state that students still get a deficient category in the content, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics components because the students still lack practice to deepen their writing skills.

Problems Encountered in Students' English Writing Performance

The three aspects of problems encountered in students' English writing skills are interrelated with each other. If the duration given for writing is less, then the writing results provided will be less. However, in this case the students who were interviewed stated that they had no problems with the duration of learning. The normal duration of learning for students at junior high school level is 40 minutes, whereas in the descriptive text writing test in English given to students, students are only given 30 minutes. This is in line because it has been regulated by the (Minister of Education and Culture Regulation, No. 35, 2018) regarding the duration of learning for students at the junior high school level, they are only given 40 minutes. Next, on the use of Google Translate in learning. In his research, (Aziez, 2019) found that Google Translate had a positive impact on the learning process, but on the other hand, the translations produced by Google Translate were sometimes inaccurate or the meaning was ambiguous. From the results of the research above, it does not rule out the possibility that students at the junior high school level will also be able to check every word or sentence they translate via Google Translate. This is a serious matter for students' future writing abilities. Which, in turn, can have an impact on the difficulties students experience in spelling (mechanics) knowledge. The difficulties experienced by junior high school students with spelling in English are nothing new. Other research, (Al-Khasawneh, 2014) believes that students of English as a foreign language have challenges in writing which can be caused by linguistic disorders and also poor transfer from the mother tongue. This can be corrected by teachers teaching students intensively about spelling and the differences between each word because it is a very basic problem for students to start writing.

CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation of the research results in the findings and discussions section, the researcher can outline the following conclusions:

1. Based on the results of the analysis of student's performance in writing descriptive texts in English in 1st grade at the junior high school level, the average score obtained from the overall results was 68,23. Therefore, the researcher can conclude that the performance of writing descriptive texts in English by students of SMP Negeri 26 Makassar in 1st grade can be categorized as good. There are 5 components in writing performance, and only 1 of which gets good to the average category, that is the organization components. Meanwhile, there are 3 of them get the fair to poor category, the contents, vocabulary, and grammar components. And for the rest of the mechanics component, students get a very poor category.
2. The 1st grade students at SMP Negeri 26 Makassar still have problems with their ability to write in English, especially in terms of vocabulary. This is because students are still not used to it and are still learning English for the first time at school. Because of this, students feel a little difficulty and are given relief by the teacher at school to use translation aids or Google Translate to make learning easier in class and not spend more time. As a result, students feel dependent and have difficulty when faced with a writing test without using the help of a dictionary or Google Translate.

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