AN ANALYSIS OF WRITING DIFFICULTIES IN PRODUCING DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS AMONG ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Writing is a crucial skill in English language learning that requires the integration of linguistic, cognitive, and organizational components, making it one of the most challenging areas for many EFL students. This study aims to analyze the writing difficulties encountered by third-semester English major students in producing descriptive texts and to identify the linguistic aspects contributing to these challenges. Employing a qualitative descriptive research design, data were collected from students' written descriptive texts and questionnaire responses. Students were asked to compose a descriptive text based on a given topic, while the questionnaire explored their perceptions of writing difficulties. The findings reveal four dominant categories of difficulties: grammatical problems, limited vocabulary, weak text organization, and challenges in developing ideas. Grammar emerged as the most problematic aspect, with frequent errors in tenses, subject–verb agreement, and articles. Vocabulary limitations led to repetitive and inaccurate word choices, while organizational issues appeared in unclear generic structure, weak coherence, and minimal use of cohesive devices. Students also struggled to elaborate ideas, resulting in brief and underdeveloped descriptions. The questionnaire results supported the text analysis, indicating that grammar, vocabulary, idea generation, and organization were perceived as their main challenges. Overall, the study concludes that the writing difficulties experienced by students are influenced by linguistic limitations and insufficient understanding of genre conventions. These findings emphasize the need for integrated and process-oriented writing instruction focusing on grammatical accuracy, vocabulary enrichment, genre awareness, and pre-writing strategies to support students in improving their descriptive writing performance.

Keywords: writing difficulties, descriptive text, EFL students, grammar problems, vocabulary limitations

ABSTRAK

Menulis merupakan keterampilan penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang membutuhkan integrasi komponen linguistik, kognitif, dan organisasi, sehingga menjadi salah satu aspek yang paling menantang bagi banyak pembelajar EFL. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesulitan menulis yang dialami oleh mahasiswa semester tiga jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris dalam menghasilkan teks deskriptif serta mengidentifikasi aspek linguistik yang berkontribusi terhadap kesulitan tersebut. Menggunakan desain penelitian deskriptif kualitatif, data

dikumpulkan dari teks deskriptif tulisan mahasiswa dan respons kuesioner. Mahasiswa diminta untuk menulis sebuah teks deskriptif berdasarkan topik yang diberikan, sementara kuesioner digunakan untuk menggali persepsi mereka tentang kesulitan menulis. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan empat kategori utama kesulitan, yaitu masalah tata bahasa, keterbatasan kosakata, kelemahan dalam organisasi teks, dan tantangan dalam mengembangkan ide. Tata bahasa muncul sebagai aspek yang paling bermasalah, dengan kesalahan yang sering terjadi pada penggunaan tenses, kesesuaian subjek–kata kerja, dan penggunaan artikel. Keterbatasan kosakata menyebabkan penggunaan kata yang berulang dan tidak tepat, sementara masalah organisasi tampak pada struktur generik yang tidak jelas, koherensi yang lemah, serta minimnya penggunaan perangkat kohesi. Mahasiswa juga mengalami kesulitan dalam mengembangkan ide, sehingga menghasilkan deskripsi yang singkat dan kurang terperinci. Hasil kuesioner mendukung analisis teks, menunjukkan bahwa tata bahasa, kosakata, pengembangan ide, dan organisasi dianggap sebagai tantangan utama. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kesulitan menulis mahasiswa dipengaruhi oleh keterbatasan linguistik dan kurangnya pemahaman tentang konvensi genre. Temuan ini menekankan perlunya pembelajaran menulis yang terintegrasi dan berorientasi proses, dengan fokus pada ketepatan tata bahasa, pengayaan kosakata, pemahaman genre, dan strategi pra-menulis untuk membantu mahasiswa meningkatkan kemampuan menulis teks deskriptif.

Kata kunci: kesulitan menulis, teks deskriptif, mahasiswa EFL, masalah tata bahasa, keterbatasan kosakata.

A. Introduction

Writing is one of the essential language skills that plays a crucial role in academic contexts, particularly for students majoring in English education. Writing enables learners to express ideas, convey meaning, and demonstrate their linguistic competence in a structured and coherent manner. However, writing is widely recognized as a complex skill because it requires the integration of multiple components, including content development, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary mastery, and text organization (Hyland 2021). As a result, many learners experience difficulties in producing effective written texts, especially in a second or foreign language context.

In English language teaching, descriptive text is one of the fundamental genres introduced to students at both secondary and

tertiary levels. Descriptive text aims to describe people, places, objects, or phenomena vividly and systematically so that readers can form clear mental images (Potradinata 2018). Despite its basic nature, descriptive writing often poses challenges for students. Previous studies indicate that students commonly struggle with limited vocabulary, incorrect grammatical structures, weak organization, and difficulty in developing ideas cohesively when writing descriptive texts (Duha 2024). These difficulties suggest that mastering descriptive writing is not as simple as expected.

From a theoretical perspective, students' writing difficulties can be explained through cognitive and linguistic theories of writing. Process-based writing theory emphasizes that writing involves several recursive stages, such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing, all of which require significant cognitive effort (Peng et al. 2021). In addition, second language writing theory highlights that EFL learners often face challenges due to limited linguistic resources, insufficient exposure to authentic writing tasks, and inadequate feedback during the learning process (Hyland 2021). These theoretical frameworks indicate that writing difficulties are multifaceted and influenced by both internal and external factors.

A number of previous studies have investigated writing difficulties in EFL contexts. (Purnamasari, Hidayat, and Kurniawati 2021) found that students experienced major problems in grammar usage and vocabulary selection when writing descriptive texts. (Ahmed 2021) reported that students' difficulties were closely related to poor mastery of language features and lack of writing practice. Similarly, (Pasaribu et al. 2024) revealed that ineffective instructional strategies and limited feedback contributed to students' low writing performance. Although these studies provide valuable insights, most of them focus on secondary school students or general EFL learners rather than English major students at the university level.

In fact, English major students are expected to possess better writing competence since writing courses are continuously taught across semesters. However, preliminary observations

indicate that many third-semester students in the English Education Study Program still encounter difficulties in producing descriptive texts, even though this text type has been introduced in previous semesters. This condition suggests that certain writing difficulties persist and remain unresolved. Therefore, there is a research gap in exploring the specific writing difficulties experienced by early-semester English major students, particularly through an in-depth qualitative investigation.

As a result, the purpose of this study is to get a better knowledge of the writing issues encountered by third-semester students in the English Education Study Program when composing descriptive texts, as well as the elements that contribute to them. In accordance with its qualitative descriptive approach, this study examines students' written texts and their opinions on the writing process in order to achieve the following objectives.

1. To identify the types of writing difficulties encountered by third-semester English major students in producing descriptive texts.

2. To explore the factors perceived by students as contributing to their writing difficulties in producing descriptive texts.

The findings of this study are expected to provide theoretical implications by enriching the literature on second language writing, particularly regarding writing difficulties among English major students at the tertiary level. Practically, this study is expected to offer valuable insights for lecturers, curriculum designers, and educators in improving writing instruction, developing more effective teaching strategies, and providing appropriate feedback to enhance students' writing skills

B. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to analyze the writing difficulties encountered by third-semester English major students of the English Education Study Program in producing descriptive texts. This approach was selected because it enables an in-depth description of students' writing

problems and the factors underlying those problems within their natural learning context, without manipulating variables (Tisdell, E. J., Merriam, S. B., & Stuckey-Peyrot 2025) The participants were third-semester students selected through purposive sampling, as they had previously received instruction in descriptive writing and were considered relevant to the research objectives. Data were collected using two instruments: students' written descriptive texts and semi-structured interviews. The written texts were analyzed to identify types of writing difficulties related to grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and organization of ideas, while the interviews were conducted to explore students' perceived causes of these difficulties. Data collection was carried out in two stages, beginning with the collection of students' written texts followed by interviews with selected participants. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis by systematically examining the texts and interview transcripts through coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify recurring patterns and themes related to students' writing difficulties (Toba, Noor, and Sanu 2019)

C. Result and Discussion

The results of this study were derived from two primary data sources: students' descriptive writing texts and semi-structured interviews conducted after the writing task. The analysis of the students' texts focused on four core aspects of writing quality, namely grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and organization of ideas. These aspects were selected to capture both linguistic competence and discourse-level performance in descriptive text writing.

The study of students' descriptive texts showed that grammatical accuracy was the most significant challenge. Many pupils had recurrent problems with tense usage, sentence structure, and subject-verb agreement. These grammatical errors frequently clouded meaning and weakened the clarity of the descriptions produced. This finding is consistent with (Hafizah 2023) report that grammatical errors continue to be the most common impediment to EFL learners' ability to write descriptive texts, particularly when students lack sufficient control over fundamental sentence patterns.

Students' writing was found to be significantly hampered by vocabulary limitations in addition to grammar-related issues. The pupils' descriptions were generally rather than specifically detailed because they tended to focus on simple and repetitive lexical words. Students' capacity to articulate concepts clearly was hampered by this limited vocabulary. (Nuralisaputri and Megawati 2023) revealed similar results, emphasizing that learners' expressive potential in descriptive writing tasks is limited by poor vocabulary mastery, which results in monotonous text production.

The texts written by the students also had cohesion problems. Cohesive devices like conjunctions and transition markers were rarely employed correctly, and several pieces lacked obvious logical connections between sentences. As a result, the thoughts were disjointed and challenging to follow. This outcome confirms the findings of (Hafizah 2023), who discovered that EFL learners usually have trouble staying coherent because they are not aware of the proper way to connect ideas both within and between sentences.

Additionally, issues with idea structure were noted in the descriptive texts written by the students. Some pupils produced disjointed works because they were unable to distinguish between the genre's identification and description components. The text's overall readability suffered as a result of the ideas being frequently given out of order. This phenomena is in line with the findings of (Mulyasin et al. 2023), who contend that poor organization in descriptive writing is largely caused by a lack of grasp of genre structure.

To provide a clearer description of students' writing performance, the findings of the descriptive writing test are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of Descriptive Writing Test Analysis

Aspect	Description of Students' Performance
Grammar	Frequent errors in tense usage, sentence structure, and subject–verb agreement

Vocabulary	Limited word choice and repetition of simple vocabulary
Coherence	Weak logical connections between sentences and ideas
Organization of Ideas	Unclear generic structure and unsystematic idea arrangement

The results from the writing test were further supported by the interview data. Grammar was the most difficult part of the writing process, according to the majority of pupils. They expressed difficulty choosing the proper tenses and constructing grammatically sound phrases. (Duha 2024), who discovered that learners' low grammatical confidence frequently causes hesitancy and increased error frequency in writing activities, supports this view.

In terms of vocabulary, students acknowledged that it was challenging to fully explain concepts due to their restricted vocabulary. Many students frequently used dictionaries or translation software, which occasionally led to the selection of improper words. This result is consistent with the findings of (Februansyah, Nugraha, and Fajriah

2020), who pointed out that an excessive reliance on translation tools indicates a lack of lexical competency and may have a detrimental impact on students' writing quality.

Additionally, students reported having trouble keeping their ideas coherent and logically arranged. They said they were unsure of how to organize ideas into coherent paragraphs and make seamless sentence connections. (Murbarani 2024) observed similar interview-based findings and came to the conclusion that students' incapacity to create cohesive and well-organized descriptive writings is a result of their lack of discourse awareness.

Additionally, a number of students expressed uncertainty regarding the basic framework of descriptive texts, especially with regard to differentiating between general identification and thorough description. According to (Dwijayanti, F., Oktarini, W., & Devanti 2025), learners showed inadequate comprehension of genre conventions despite prior teaching. This indicates a lack of genre awareness, which has been highlighted as a primary source of writing difficulty.

The results of the interview analysis are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of Interview Analysis

Aspect	Dominant Student Responses
Grammar	Confusion in using tenses and forming correct sentences
Vocabulary	Limited vocabulary and reliance on translation tools
Coherence	Difficulty connecting sentences logically
Organization of Ideas	Uncertainty in arranging ideas systematically

There is a substantial correlation between students' perceived challenges and their actual writing performance, as seen by the consistency between the descriptive writing test results and the interview data. The conclusions' reliability is reinforced by this convergence of data. Such uniformity across several data sources increases the reliability of qualitative research through triangulation, claim (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana 2022). Overall, the study's results show that associated linguistic and discourse-level elements, such as grammatical proficiency, vocabulary mastery, coherence, and concept structure, affect students' challenges when creating descriptive writings. (Basya 2018), who highlight that writing challenges in EFL environments frequently result from a combination of language form restrictions and inadequate textual organizing skills, further reinforce these findings.

D. Conclusion

The interview findings supported the text analysis, revealing that students were aware of these difficulties and perceived linguistic limitations and genre understanding as the main factors affecting their writing performance. The consistency between students' written texts and their perceptions strengthens the credibility of the findings through data triangulation. Overall, the study emphasizes the need for process-oriented writing instruction that focuses on grammatical accuracy, vocabulary enrichment, genre awareness, and idea development to improve students' descriptive writing skills at the tertiary level.

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