

Evaluating Vocabulary, Mechanics, and Organization in High School Students' Descriptive Writing

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Article Info

Keywords:

Descriptive text; Mechanics; Paragraph organization; Vocabulary; Writing ability.

ABSTRACT

Writing descriptive text requires a complex integration of vocabulary, mechanics, and organization, which often presents significant challenges for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. This study aims to describe and evaluate the writing abilities of second-grade students in composing descriptive texts, specifically focusing on their proficiency in vocabulary usage, mechanical accuracy, and paragraph organization at SMA Negeri 1 Popayato. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the research gathered data through targeted writing tests administered to a random sample of 20 students. The data were analyzed and categorized using standardized scoring criteria. The synthesized results revealed that the students' overall writing ability falls into the average category, with a mean score of 45.4. Specifically, the highest frequency of errors occurred in vocabulary (55%), characterized by limited word range and direct native-language translation, followed by organizational flaws (50%) and mechanical errors in capitalization and punctuation (45%). In conclusion, the students require targeted instructional strategies emphasizing contextual vocabulary building and mechanical practices to improve the coherence and accuracy of their descriptive writing.

Informasi Artikel

Kata Kunci:

Teks deskriptif; Mekanika; Organisasi paragraf; Kosakata; Kemampuan menulis

ABSTRAK

Menulis teks deskriptif membutuhkan integrasi kompleks antara kosakata, mekanika, dan organisasi, yang sering kali menghadirkan tantangan signifikan bagi siswa English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan dan mengevaluasi kemampuan siswa kelas dua dalam menyusun teks deskriptif, secara spesifik berfokus pada kemahiran mereka dalam penggunaan kosakata, akurasi mekanikal, dan organisasi paragraf di SMA Negeri 1 Popayato. Menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data melalui tes menulis yang diberikan kepada sampel acak sebanyak 20 siswa. Data dianalisis dan dikategorikan menggunakan kriteria penilaian terstandar. Hasil sintesis mengungkapkan bahwa kemampuan menulis siswa secara keseluruhan berada pada kategori rata-rata, dengan skor rata-rata 45.4. Secara spesifik, frekuensi kesalahan tertinggi terjadi pada kosakata (55%), yang ditandai dengan jangkauan kata yang terbatas dan terjemahan langsung bahasa ibu, diikuti oleh kelemahan organisasi (50%) dan kesalahan mekanikal dalam kapitalisasi dan tanda baca (45%). Kesimpulannya, siswa memerlukan strategi instruksional yang ditargetkan dengan menekankan pada pembangunan kosakata kontekstual dan praktik mekanikal untuk meningkatkan koherensi dan akurasi tulisan deskriptif mereka.

Article History

Received : 02 07, 2025
Revised : 02 20, 2025
Accepted : 07 21, 2025

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1. Introduction

Teaching English writing skills to high school students requires moving beyond basic grammar to producing coherent, fluent, and well-organized texts. Among various text types, descriptive texts are fundamentally designed to vividly illustrate a particular person, place, or thing, demanding a high level of linguistic precision. Previous studies highlight that EFL learners frequently struggle to master writing due to the cognitive overload of translating thoughts while simultaneously managing syntax and discourse markers [1], [2]. While recent literature extensively covers digital writing interventions and general writing fluency [3], [4], there remains a critical research gap regarding the specific micro-level difficulties—namely vocabulary, mechanics, and organization—faced by students in rural educational settings where English exposure is minimal. Therefore, this study introduces a novelty by systematically mapping the precise distribution of writing errors in descriptive texts among second-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Popayato. By evaluating the fundamental components of writing rather than holistic scores alone, this research aims to describe the students' specific abilities and provide a granular understanding of their deficiencies, which is essential for developing targeted pedagogical strategies.

2. Method

This research utilized a descriptive qualitative design to systematically and accurately describe the phenomena related to students' writing characteristics without testing hypotheses. The study was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Popayato, located in Pohuwato Regency, during the 2023/2024 academic year. The population consisted of second-grade students, from which a sample of 20 participants was selected using a random sampling technique to ensure representativeness. Data were collected using a writing test as the primary instrument, wherein students were instructed to independently compose a descriptive text. The analysis process involved reviewing each student's written product and breaking it down into three specific components: vocabulary usage, mechanical accuracy (punctuation and capitalization), and paragraph organization (identification and description). The data were quantified into skill levels and qualitatively analyzed using Brown's (2007) standard scoring criteria for writing, which categorizes students' abilities into five distinct levels: Excellent, Good, Average, Fair, and Poor. This methodological rigor ensures that the evaluation is objective and replicable.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The analysis of the writing tests revealed that the overall

ability of the second-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Popayato in writing descriptive texts is classified as 'Average'. Out of the 20 students tested, the total accumulated score was 908, yielding a mean score of 45.4. Specifically, the distribution showed that 13 students (65%) performed at an average level, 7 students (35%) fell into the poor category, and notably, no students achieved good or excellent scores. When examining the specific writing components, the data indicate that students encountered the most significant difficulties in vocabulary. Approximately 55% of the errors identified in the students' texts were related to vocabulary limitations. Students frequently demonstrated a poor knowledge of English vocabulary, leading them to rely heavily on direct Indonesian translations or literal phrasing, such as writing "My mother present me for year" instead of "My mother brought me a present". Organization accounted for 50% of the difficulties, wherein students often failed to provide complete identifications or misused connectives, causing the descriptive paragraphs to lack logical flow and cohesion. Furthermore, mechanics-related errors constituted 45% of the deficiencies. The students' texts were heavily dominated by severe errors in basic capitalization and punctuation, such as failing to capitalize proper nouns (e.g., the cat's name "bebe") and misusing commas.

3.2 Discussion

The findings clearly illustrate that constructing a descriptive paragraph remains a highly complex task for the students, confirming the assertion that writing involves a demanding integration of thinking and drafting. The high frequency of vocabulary errors (55%) aligns with current EFL theories suggesting that limited lexical range severely hinders students from expressing accurate meaning [5]. The pervasive use of native-language structures within their English texts indicates a strong L1 interference, a common hurdle where learners translate word-for-word rather than conceptualizing the target language's syntax [6].

Moreover, the organizational weaknesses found in this study (50%) highlight a fundamental lack of understanding of rhetorical conventions. According to recent studies, the inability to properly structure the 'identification' and 'description' phases in descriptive texts stems from insufficient exposure to well-structured reading materials [7], [8]. When students do not comprehend how discourse markers function, their sentences become disjointed. Additionally, the mechanical errors (45%) point to a systemic issue in basic writing mechanics instruction. While earlier research emphasizes that writing creates a permanent record of knowledge, this permanence also glaringly exposes technical flaws. The consistent failure to apply capitalization rules suggests that students may be treating writing merely as spoken language transcribed onto paper, ignoring the formal conventions necessary for written discourse [9]. These combined factors place the students squarely in the average-to-poor spectrum, requiring immediate pedagogical

intervention focused on vocabulary expansion and structural practice.

4. Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive evaluation, it can be concluded that the second-grade students of SMA Negeri 1 Popayato possess an average ability in writing descriptive texts, with a mean score of 45.4. The analysis highlighted that students struggle the most with vocabulary selection, frequently resorting to literal translations due to a limited lexical range. Additionally, mechanical issues such as improper capitalization and poor paragraph organization—specifically the lack of clear identification and descriptive flow—further diminish the quality of their writing. The absence of any students in the 'Good' or 'Excellent' categories underscores that the current instructional methods may need to be revised to better address these specific micro-level deficiencies

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