# AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS

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**Abstract**
The objective of this study is to find out the difficulties of writing descriptive text and what factors causing difficulties in writing descriptive text. This study involved 12 students in eighth grade of junior high school in Cipongkor. To obtain the data, three kinds of the research instruments were used, namely a writing test (Heaton, 1988), questionnaire and observation. The findings based on the writing test showed that the errors produced by the students were missordering with 33.6%, the punctuation 26.8%, the tenses 17.4%, wrong diction 12.1%, spelling 7.4%, and the last is prepositions 2.7%. Based on the questionnaire and observation, the factors caused students difficulties in writing descriptive text are lack of interest in learning English, the poor understanding of the generic structure of descriptive test, poor in grammar knowledge and use, and the low motivation in writing descriptive text.

**Keywords**: Errors, Descriptive Text, Writing

## INTRODUCTION

Language is a medium of communication between humans since they were born. Language is used to express ideas, feelings and thoughts in oral and written forms. One important language is English because English is an international language and is very important to learn in Indonesia. English is a language that has an important role in many aspects of the world, one of which is as daily communication tool, therefore English is important for students to learn in Indonesia.

One of the important skills in teaching English is writing. Harmer (2004) as cited in (Apsari, 2018) states that in teaching English, writing has always formed part of the syllabus. According to Alves (2008) as cited in (Farizi et al., 2019), the way of communication of making contact between the readers and the writer is writing. For the readers, the writer truly gives something that may be valuable, and the people who will read what they write. Besides, Firdaus & Sunaryo (2013) as cited in (Farizi et al., 2019) states that writing is a kind of social communication where someone reads what others have written. It all means that there is a communication between reader and writer. There are several components involved in writing, which must be considered such as word choice, use of appropriate grammar, syntax, mechanics, and organization of ideas into cohesive and coherent form Gebhard (1996) as cited in (Apsari, 2018).

Blanchard and Root (1998) as cited in Mundriyah and Parmawati (2016) state that learning to write in a new language is not always easy. Graham (2006) as cited in Parmawati, Santoso, & Yana (2020) states that students have to struggle significantly with writing and if someone does not write well he will find difficulties in the process of learning, education, andwork. According to Meyers (2005) cited in (Pratiwi et al., 2019) states that to produce language you do naturally when you speak is by writing. So, writing is a form of communication that allows students to put their feelings and ideas on paper, to organize their knowledge and beliefs into convincing

arguments, and to convey meaning through well constructed text. When we write, we have to notice on some components, such as vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and grammar.

Furthermore, Based on Harmer (2004) "Writing is often not time bound in the way conversation is. When writing, student frequently have more time to think then they do in oral activities. They can go through what they know in their mind, and even consult dictionaries, grammar books or other refference material to help them". The students should use correct dictions, grammar and spelling words especially in written text, that's why writing is not easy. It also a mental work involving the discovery of ideas, how to express and organize them into a clear statement that can be understood by the reader (Rizqiya, 2017) as cited in (Kasini & Pusparaini, 2019)

## Descriptive Text

One of the types of texts required to be written by Indonesian junior high school students is a descriptive text. And when you are writing about what a person, place, or thing it called descriptive text, that is one of the texts that close to the learners' life like stated by Blaylock (2006) cited in (Exdriko et al., 2011). A descriptive text usually has two main sections: first identification it is about how to introduction of a person, place, animal, or object will be described. And second it is about description of something such as animal, things, place or person by describing its feature, forms, colors, or anything related to what the writer describe. Descriptive text also has characteristic or language features such as adjectives and compound adjective dominant to use and using the simple present tense. According to Derewianka (2000) as cited in (Kasini & Pusparaini, 2019) "Descriptive text is give an account of how something works or reasons for some phenomenon". In the other words descriptive  text is a text which tell and describe people or a think a like.

## METHOD

The research methodology was used qualitative descriptive method. Perry (2005) as cited in (Dewi et al., 2019) qualitative research is characterized by the verbal description of its data. This is because the writer analyzed the data descriptively and the presentation of the result was in form of explanation of words which would be supported by data presented in the form of table. Suryana (2010) as cited in (Royani & Sadiah, 2019) claims that descriptive research is focused to make description sistematically and accuratelly based on fact about a certain object. This study was conducted in a class of eighth grader students of one junior high school in Cipongkor. Furthermore, this study is intended to explain the difficulties that students' faced.

In term of data collection technique, this study uses a writing test. Heaton (1988) says that test is equally necessary to diagnose the student's weaknesses and difficulties. In this case, the test applied is writing skill test. The students were asked to write descriptive texts, using theme "Member of Family" and they should wrote minimum two paragraphs and then their texts were collected. The test of writing descriptive text was used to find out the students' writing skill and ability. Then, error analysis Richards (1973) as cited in Ayusti (2015) was conducted. The errors were identified to analyze the students' difficulty in writing descriptive text by using British Council reference in correcting the students' writing. Those are Spelling (Sp), Wrong Diction (WD), Miss Ordering (MO), tense (T), Preposition (Pr), and punctuation (Pu).

The second data collection technique is a survey questionnaires. According to Mackey & Gass (2005) cited in (Apsari et al., 2019) Questionnaire survey is on of the most common methods

of data collection on attitudes and opinion from large group of participants. The questionnaires used in this study consist of 16 items with closed format questions. The questions concern the difficulties that the students encounter in writing descriptive text.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The results of the writing test are presented in tables 1. Table 1 below shows the result of the errors produced by the students. The students produced errors in total. They produced errors in verb tenses (T), wrong diction (WD), missordering (Mo), spelling (SP), punctuation (Pu), and preposition (Pr) subsequently.

**Table 1**
**The frequency of students' errors**

| No | Categories of Errors | Frequency of Errors | Percentage (%) |
|----|----------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Spelling (Sp) | 11 | 7.4 |
| 2 | Wrong Diction (WD) | 18 | 12,1 |
| 3 | Missordering (Mo) | 50 | 33,6 |
| 4 | Tense (T) | 26 | 17,4 |
| 5 | Preposition (Pr) | 4 | 2,7 |
| 6 | Punctuation (Pu) | 40 | 26,8 |
| | **Total** | 149 | 100 |

As said by the data above, the highest frequency of errors that the students produced was missordering with 33.6%. It was followed by the use of punctuation as much as 26.8%. The third highest amount of errors was tenses with 17.4%. Wrong diction came next with 12.1%. Errors in spelling were produced as much as 7.4%. The least errors that students produced were the inaccurate use of prepositions with 2.7%.

The following table presents the result of the questionnaires to expose the factors that cause the errors that the students produce based on the students' perception. The questionnaires expose some insight on the causes of the difficulties that the students encounter when they write descriptive text.

**Table 2**
**The questionnaire result**

| No | Items | Choices of answers | Number of answers | Percentage (%) |
|----|-------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|

| 1 | Do you like learning English? | Yes | 5 | 41,7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | Not sure | 7 | 58,3 |
|  |  | No |  |  |
| 2 | Do you like to write? | Yes | 8 | 66,7 |
|  |  | Not really | 3 | 25 |
|  |  | No | 1 | 8,3 |
| 3 | Do you like learning to write with descriptive text material? | Yes | 6 | 50 |
|  |  | A little | 5 | 41.7 |
|  |  | No | 1 | 8,3 |
| 4 | Do you know the generic structure of descriptive text? | Yes | 5 | 41,7 |
|  |  | Not sure | 4 | 33.3 |
|  |  | No | 3 | 25 |
| 5 | Do you understand the generic structure of descriptive text? | Yes | 1 | 8,3 |
|  |  | Not really | 8 | 66,7 |
|  |  | No | 3 | 25 |
| 6 | Have you learned simple present tense? | Yes | 3 | 25 |
|  |  | Not sure | 6 | 50 |
|  |  | No | 3 | 25 |
| 7 | Do you understand how to use simple present tense? | Yes | 3 | 25 |
|  |  | Not really | 3 | 25 |
|  |  | No | 6 | 50 |
| 8 | What is the reason to write a descriptive text? | Writing practice | 5 | 41,7 |
|  |  | Assignment from the teacher | 7 | 58,3 |
| 9 | Are you enthusiastic when your teacher assigns you to write descriptive text? | Yes | 4 | 33,3 |
|  |  | A little | 8 | 66,7 |
|  |  | No |  |  |
| 10 | Do you ask your teacher for help when you encounter difficulties in writing a descriptive text? | Yes | 9 | 75 |
|  |  | Not sure | 2 | 16.7 |
|  |  | No | 1 | 8,3 |

| 11 | Do you struggle to put down your ideas into words when you write a descriptive text? | Yes | 6 | 50 |
|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | A little | 6 | 50 |
| | | No | | |
| 12 | Do you seek for a sample text to help you express your ideas when you write a descriptive text? | Yes | 11 | 91,7 |
| | | No | 1 | 8,3 |
| 13 | Do you like it if in learning to write with descriptive text material using a group (cooperative learning) method with flashcard media? | Yes | 9 | 75 |
| | | A little | 3 | 25 |
| | | No | | |
| 14 | Is the method of grouping with flashcard media on descriptive text material in learning to write interesting enough? | Yes | 8 | 66,7 |
| | | A little | 3 | 25 |
| | | No | 1 | 8,3 |
| 15 | Does the method of grouping with flashcard media on descriptive material in learning to write can increase your motivation in learning English? | Yes | 3 | 25 |
| | | A little | 8 | 66,7 |
| | | No | 1 | 8,3 |
| 16 | Does the method of grouping with flashcard media on descriptive text material in learning to write can improve your writing skills? | Yes | 8 | 66,7 |
| | | A little | 4 | 33,3 |
| | | No | | |

According to the data above showed that 58.3% students little bit like to learn English and 41.7% like to learn English. Another fact that 66.7% students like to write and 50% students like learning to write with descriptive text material. From items 4 and 5 reveal that one of the sources of difficulties in writing descriptive text is generic structure. Despite the fact they know the names of the parts of generic structure, 91.7 % of the students are still confused about generic structure of descriptive text. Items 6 and 7 showed that students struggle with the grammar of descriptive text. 25% students already learn simple present tense and 75% students perhaps they forgot learn simple present tense that teachers already teach. And this is another difficulties in writing that the student faced.

Items 8 and 9 reveal the students' motivation in descriptive text. Fewer students write descriptive text as personal practice (41.7%). Fewer students are enthusiastic to write descriptive texts (33.3%) and the lasting students are a little enthusiastic. Item 10 is the role of teacher in assisting students to write descriptive text. Most of students (75%) ask the teacher for helping them in writing descriptive text. It can be seen that students active and eager to learn the material. Items 11 and 12 reveal the students' difficulties in the process of writing. Some of students perceive that they find difficulties in expressing their ideas into words (50%) despite

consulting to sample text (91.7%). Briefly, organizing ideas is still a challenge for student and they do not seem to apply a systematic writing process.

Items 13 to 16 reveal students' perspective in writing process with descriptive text material using flashcard media. Most of the students like to learning to write with descriptive text material using a group (cooperative learning) method with flashcard media (75%). Moreover, (66.7%) think that using method of grouping with flashcard media on descriptive text material in learning to write interesting enough. (75%) of the students showed that learning to write with group and using flashcard media can't increase their motivation in learning English but (66.7%) told that it can improving their writing skills.

## Discussion

After analising the data, the researchers found that errors that students made are missordering with 33.6%. The second error is the use of punctuation as much as 26.8%. The third highest amount of errors was tenses with 17.4%. Wrong diction came next with 12.1%. The fourth errors is spelling, spelling were produced as much as 7.4%. The least errors that students produced were the inaccurate use of prepositions with 2.7%. Its means that teacher need to improve students writing skill.

The result of students questionnaire indicate that the teacher should make English lessons more fun and interesting so that it can motivate students in learning English and being enthusiastic in learning to write. The teacher should focus on how to teach grammar as well because a lot of students still confused how to make simple present tense. The students also confused how to expressing their ideas into words, so this is an obstacle in their writing process.

## CONCLUSION

As the result of error analysis suggested, the difficulties that the students faced in writing descriptive test are problems with missordering with 33.6%, the punctuation as much as 26.8%, the verb tenses 17.4%, the wrong diction 12.1%, spelling 7.4%, and the last is prepositions 2.7%. The result of the questionnaire showed the perceived factors that cause the difficulties. The first factor is lack of interest in learning English. The second factor is their poor understanding of the generic structure of descriptive text. Next factor is poor in grammar use. And another factor is their low motivation in writing process.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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