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Academia Open



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Deciphering Descriptive Text Challenges: Seventh-Grade Students' Writing Difficulties

Membongkar Tantangan Menulis Teks Deskriptif: Kesulitan dan Penyebab pada Siswa Kelas Tujuh

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive research explores the challenges faced by seventh-grade students in writing descriptive text and identifies their underlying causes. The study, conducted at SMP PGRI 16 Sidoarjo, employed students' writing exercises and interviews with an English teacher and first-grade students as data instruments. The analysis revealed three key areas of difficulty: generic structure, grammar (including the use of nouns, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, and simple present tense), and spelling. The identified causes encompassed inadequate English proficiency, insufficient knowledge of descriptive text material, disinterest in learning English, as well as internal and external factors such as family background and students' skills and capabilities. The findings shed light on the specific areas of difficulty and their root causes, providing valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers aiming to enhance students' proficiency in writing descriptive text.

Highlights:

- Students' difficulties in writing descriptive text: The study identifies challenges in the generic structure, grammar, and spelling faced by seventh-grade students.
- Causes of difficulties: The research uncovers factors such as English proficiency, knowledge gaps in descriptive text material, lack of interest in learning English, and internal/external influences.
- Implications for educators: The findings offer insights to enhance instructional approaches and curriculum development for improving students' proficiency in descriptive text writing.

Keywords: descriptive text, seventh-grade students, difficulties, causes, qualitative research.

Published date: 2023-06-26 00:00:00

Introduction

Nowadays, learning English is necessary for students. Yulianti, Nuraeni, & Parmawati [1] elaborated that the English Language is important to be learned by people because English has become an international language and the using of English has spread around the world. On the other side, there are four skills in learning English: Speaking, Listening, Writing, and Reading.

In this case, writing is one of these skills that should be mastered by students, Durga and Rao [2] stated that writing is very important in communication which is more needed to transmit through writing than the other media. therefore, students need to study and train their writing skills effectively to achieve their academic needs and workplace requirements.

In addition, Sarlin S [3] stated that writing is one of the activities of pouring ideas, feelings, and thoughts which can be expressed into many words, it can also represent indirect communication through virtual or non-virtual tools for transferring language, collecting information, and communicating ideas.

Regarding the statements that have been mentioned, writing is one of the most important of these skills, by writing, we can express what we feel, opinions, and create our thought to be published into a book, novel, blog, magazine, newspaper, etc. According to Novita, [4] Writing has an important role in human life, they can share and elaborate their thought and idea by writing without speaking a single word.

However, writing becomes one of the most difficult to be learned by students, especially in junior high school. Compared to the speaking skill, writing needs a lot of requirements, such as the idea of writing to create some ideas and information into sentences, choose the appropriate vocabulary, grammatical patterns, arrange the sentence regarding the sentence structure, and the accuracy to avoid the misleading or misunderstanding meaning which maybe happens to the readers Hedge in Alfaki [5].

On other hand, the teacher can measure the students' understanding in learning English based on how the students write it correctly and coherently by giving writing tasks to them, such as they will be asked to write simple texts. For instance, narrative, descriptive, recount, and procedure text, as their writing exercises. Descriptive text is one of the writing materials that is taught to the seventh-grade students based on curriculum 2013. In the descriptive text, students learn how to describe and make a text by writing their idea and information that they get from the subject. Regarding the objective learning that has been mentioned in learning descriptive text, students are expected to make and compose the oral and written descriptive texts in short and simple, relating to people, animals, and objects correctly. It can be the person's appearance, group or individual, things, place, and situation. Ervina Evawina [6] stated that descriptive text is a text that is portraying someone, thing, place based on the visual or the writer's experience.

Unfortunately, there are still many students who don't have enough capability to write descriptive text well because of some factors. Sarlin S said that students still have so many difficulties in writing descriptive text, they tend to feel confused in the use of grammar, lack of vocabulary and to differ the generic structure. On other hand, based on the interview with one of the English teachers in SMP PGRI 16 SIDOARJO, Mr. Aji said that the students often get low scores when they are given a writing task, they have lack of vocabulary and less understanding of using grammar to be implemented into a sentence, and their motivation in learning English is low.

Based on the problem and some facts above, the researcher is interested to know the student's difficulties in writing descriptive text in detail by researching with the title "An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive text faced by first-grade students of SMP PGRI 16 SIDOARJO". The researcher chooses SMP PGRI 16 SIDOARJO as the place of the research because besides the school is near from the researcher house so that it can make the researcher easier to do the research, it is also based on the interview with the English teacher, many students don't have enough capability in writing English, therefore, the researcher is interested to analyze the problems and choose SMP PGRI 16 SIDOARJO as the location where the data take place.

Methodology

The researcher used qualitative descriptive that is used to analyze the data by summarizing the theories in specific terms, and the events experienced by the individual, group, or people. This study needs data collection that focuses on discovering the specific events. Thus, data collection includes observations, and examination of records, reports, and documents. This research aims to investigate the students' difficulties in descriptive text, Therefore, the researcher using qualitative research as the research method, as Latief [7] stated that qualitative research is an investigative process which is focusing on human behavior understanding.

Besides that, qualitative research is also exploring the phenomenon of study, Arikunto said that qualitative research is conducting in a normal situation and natural setting in which the condition can't be manipulated. To collect the data, the researcher also using kind of the data instruments such as Documentation and Interview by

implementing the Triangulation technique with the interactive analysis model by Miles and Huberman. According to Setiyadi in Za'in in Sari, Rozal and Andriani [8] stated that there are many kinds of triangulation, they are triangulation of time, triangulation of place, triangulation of theory, triangulation of method, and triangulation of researcher.

In this research, the researcher using the triangulation technique of method which consists of document and interview. The documentation of this research is the students' writing exercise of descriptive text, documentation is conducted for checking the students' understanding of the descriptive text and finding out students' difficulties. In the documentation, the researcher used students' worksheet exercises which were also conducted by some researchers in collecting the data. Those researchers were Sarlin S and Ismayanti and Kholiq [9] which asked the students to make a descriptive text about something, then the researcher analyzes the students' writing exercise.

In addition, the researcher observed the students and an English teacher directly. Furthermore, in the documentation, the students were asked by the researcher to make a descriptive text about their family members. Afterward, the students made a descriptive text in google form, the students were asked to choose one of the members of the family to be written and described. They can choose one of them, for instance: their father, mother, or sister, etc. Then, the researcher collected their writing task and identify them.

The second instrument was the interview, Esterberg in Sugiono [10] said that interview is a kind of conversation between two people in sharing ideas and information. The researcher used this technique to get more information and about students' difficulties in writing descriptive text. In this interview, the researcher conducts a face-to-face interview with the respondents of 7A and 7B. They are asked one by one with the same question and the researcher then takes a note based on what the students have answered. Besides that, to develop the data based on the students' answers, the researcher also uses the semi-structured interviews technique. The first participant that the researcher interviewed was the English teacher and then followed by the students of 7 A and 7 B.

Moreover, the researcher uses the interactive analysis model by Miles and Huberman, according to Miles and Huberman, there are some activities in data analysis, such as data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data collection, the researcher collecting the data by giving a writing exercise to the students to describe one of their family members and doing an interview with students and an English teacher. After that for the data reduction, after collecting the student's worksheet, the researcher checks the worksheet which is showing the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text, then the researcher takes the worksheets to be analyzed, and the students are called one by one to have an interview with the researcher by Zoom Meeting to find out the causes of the student's difficulties in writing descriptive text.

Then, in the data display step, the researcher analyzing the students' worksheets to figure out what are the difficulties that the students have through the writing descriptive text exercise about their family members that they have written. And after that, the researcher also analyzing the causes of students' difficulties in writing descriptive text from the interview that the students and the researcher have done. And in the onclusion drawing or verification, the researcher giving a conclusion to the students' difficulties and the causes of students' difficulties in writing descriptive text.

Result and Discussion

The Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text

The researcher found that there are many students' difficulties after conducting, reading, and analyzing all the students' worksheets. These difficulties are divided into three aspects as Generic Structure, Grammar, and Spelling. The details are described below:

1. Generic Structure

Many students have difficulty with the generic structure, some of the students only made the description part about their family member's personality, look, and appearance without making the identification which it is supposed to be written based on the complete generic structure such as the identification and description.

Below are some students' descriptive text writing exercises which have the same difficulty in the generic structure:

My Mom

My mother is a very beautiful person. About 165 cm tall, my mother has straight hair which is black and shiny. He also has a slightly snub nose and chubby cheeks. His eyes are brown like mine. My mother has light yellow skin color like most Indonesian women in general. Her red lips and white teeth combined a very beautiful smile. My mother is neither fat nor thin. I think her weight is quite propotional. His weight is about 65 kg.

My Father

My father is tall, he is a hard worker, sometimes he doesn't come home because he works out of town, he is very friendly, patient and nice. He is also likes eating fruits and vegetable. He is healthy and he likes jogging in the morning at 5 a.m everyday. He is my role model and my inspiration.

2. Grammar

In grammar, there are several difficulties that the researcher found, they are students' difficulties in writing nouns, pronoun, preposition, conjunction, and the using of simple present tense.

The details are as follow:

1) The students' difficulties in Writing noun

According to the students' exercise that the researcher read, it shows that students have difficulties in writing nouns. They tend to write the wrong singular and plural nouns, and the article a/an.

The students' difficulties in writing nouns are shown below:

1. My grandfather is my favorite people in my life
2. He has 3 brother and 1 sister
3. She has so many friend
4. She is like a angel

Based on the sentences above, the word "people" that is written by the student is wrong and it must be changed into "person" because the word "people" is a plural noun. After that, the word brother in the sentence "he has 3 brother" must be added "s" because the noun is more than 1 or plural noun. Same as the word friend in the sentence of "she has so many friend" it must be added "s" because the word "many" is describing that the noun is plural. And the last, "she is like a angel" must be changed into she is like **an** angel because is a singular noun that is beginning with a vowel.

2) The students' difficulties in writing Pronoun

1. "My brother's name is Naufal. Her face is oval"
2. "My mother is a very beautiful person, his eyes are brown like mine"
3. "Ila has sharp eyes. The colour of his eyes is brown"
4. "My mother is very strict in educating children, the person is very kind"

From the data that has been mentioned above, the researcher found some students' difficulties in writing pronouns. Those three sentences above are possessive pronouns. The use of "her" is used for the subject woman and "his" is used for the subject man. Here, the students didn't understand how to use the possessive pronoun properly. So, the four sentences above must be changed into the correct one, these are the correction "My brother's name is Naufal. His face is oval", "My mother is a very beautiful person, her eyes are brown like mine", "Ila has sharp eyes, the color of her eyes is brown", and "My mother is very strict in educating children, this person is very kind"

3) The student difficulties in writing preposition

Generally, the preposition is followed by a noun or pronoun. The students' difficulties in writing prepositions are mentioned below:

1. "My father is a brave man on our family"
2. "She lives on Samanhudi 2 Sidoarjo"

Based on the data above, the researcher found some students difficulties that the students had. They used the wrong preposition in writing "on". The use of on itself is used to tell and indicate that the position is on the top of something. So, the student must change the preposition "on" into "in". And "on" that was used by the second student must be changed into "at". Samandahudi 2 Sidoarjo is the name of the place in Sidoarjo city, therefore it is not using the preposition "on" or "in" because it states the specific location is not general.

4) The students' difficulties in writing conjunction

The student who didn't use the right conjunction as shown below:

"she helps me with do my homework"

The student didn't know that "with" is a preposition, not a conjunction. So, the word "with" should be changed into "to" which the word "to" has the function to show the relation and followed by the phrase, "She helps me to do my homework".

5) Students' difficulties in writing Descriptive Text on the tenses

The simple present tense is used in the descriptive text to tell, state, and show the fact, activity, repetitive activities, or an action that is still happening until now. This tense has 3 forms, such as positive, negative, and interrogative. In the positive sentence of verbal is using verb 1, for the single third person like (she, he and it), the verb must be added or followed by the suffix -s/-es, and for the nominal is using to be "is, am, and are". These are the formula of the simple present tense:

a. Positive sentence

Verbal

- Subject + Verb (+s/es) + Object + Complement

Nominal

- S + To Be (am, are, is) + Adjective/Noun/Adverb + Complement

b. Negative sentence

Verbal

- Subject + Do/does + not + Verb 1 + Object + Complement

Nominal

- Subject + to be (am, are, is) + not + Adjective/Noun/Adverb + Complement

c. Interrogative Sentence

Verbal

- Do/Does + Subject + Verb 1 + Object + Complement?

Nominal

- Am/Are/Is + Subject + Adjective/Noun/Adverb + Complement?

In the tenses difficulties that students have, the researcher has found 2 difficulties that the students often made, they were students' difficulties in writing a descriptive text on the use of simple present and the use of simple past. The details are described below:

A. The students' difficulties in writing a descriptive text on use simple present tense are described below:

1. She's don't like food, she like to petrify me.
2. She is live on samanhudi 2 Sidoarjo
3. My grandfather always love me
4. She don't have boyfriend and she is love me
5. My mother is a woman who always take care of everything
6. She's very like a pet
7. I am really want to be like her

Based on the sentences shown above, the students initial didn't understand when they must use "to be" for nominal, "do" for the subject (I, you, they, we), "does" for the subject "she, he, it) and the suffix (s/es) that must be added after the verb for the subject she, he and it. For example, the sentences which written by students such as "She's don't like food, dhe like to help me" must be changed into she doesn't like food, she likes to help me", then the sentence "she is lives on Samanhudi 2 Sidoarjo" must be changed into "She lives at Samanhudi 2 Sidoarjo", my grandfather always love me" must be changed into "my grandfather always loves me". After that, the sentence of "She don't have a boyfriend and she love me" must be changed into "she doesn't have a boyfriend and she loves me"

Afterwards, "My mother is a woman who always take care of everything" must be changed inti "My mother is a woman who always takes care of everything" and the last sentence is "I **am** really want to be like her" must be changed into "I really want to be like her".

B. The students' difficulties in writing a descriptive text on the use of simple past that is supposed to be simple present.

The researcher found some difficulties that the students have such as the wrong verb 2 and to be (was/were) that they used in the descriptive text which has found in the students' worksheet as follow:

1. He always looked cool and fashionable
2. He was handsome and I was love him until now
3. She is a very special woman who always gave me support

From the sentences that the researcher found above, the researcher concludes that some of the students are confused in using tenses of simple past and simple present tense. They are using the wrong verb that is applied in the sentence such as was, looked, and gave. So, the correct sentence must be changed into: he always looks cool, he is handsome, and I love him until now and the last one, she is a special woman who always gives me support.

3. Spelling

In spelling, the researcher found that some students made errors in spelling when they wrote the words. These are shown below:

1. "Her body is good and healty"
2. "Thanks you mother, I love you"
3. " He was handsome"
4. "beauty smile"
5. "She is the youngerst"
6. "The color of his eyes is brown somi times and smooth

Based on the sentences above, the researcher found that there some students didn't write the words correctly and it shows that they had difficulties in spelling the words. The word "healty" in the first sentence must be changed into "healthy". So, the correct sentence is "her body is good and healthy". In the second sentence, the word "thanks" is incorrect, it must be "thank you" because it is followed by "you", so the correct sentence is "thank you mother, I love you". The third sentence is also still incorrect, the words "was hes" and "shars" are wrong spelling, it must be washes and sharp. The fourth student has difficulties in arranging sentence, the student didn't understand how to arrange the adjective noun. The word "beauty" must be change into "beautiful" because it is explaining the noun "smile". The fifth student spells the word "youngerst" incorrectly, it must be changed into "youngest". In the last sentence, the student also wrote the word "somi times" incorrectly, it must be changed into "sometimes"

According to the data analysis of the documentation above which is the students' worksheet, the researcher found that students of 7A and 7B have difficulties in all aspects. The students have difficulties in generic structure, grammar, and spelling. First, the students who have difficulties in generic structure didn't make the complete structure of the descriptive text, the students only made a simple descriptive text using the description part without making the identification. Second, the students who have difficulties in grammar didn't understand how to make sentences correctly, they were confused in using and choosing nouns, pronouns, conjunction, preposition, and the use of simple present tense that must be applied in the descriptive text. And third, the students who have difficulties in spelling are making some errors spelling in some words.

The Causes of Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text

After interviewing an English teacher and 4 students using the Indonesian language with the same question "What are the causes that make you have difficulties in writing the descriptive text?". The researcher found that four causes made students' difficulties in writing descriptive text as follow:

1. Lack of knowledge relating to the material

The researcher concluded that most of the students who did mistakes in writing a descriptive text about the family members conveyed that they don't understand what descriptive text is, this is supported by students' statement which is "I don't know the structure of descriptive text miss, that is why I only make the description part", besides, another student revealed the same way as the statement that has been shown in this point.

2. Lack of English proficiency

Some students have difficulties because of their lack of English Proficiency, they tend to be confused about how to arrange the words into a sentence and it makes the students often do many mistakes in writing descriptive text, as one of the students said in the interview "I can't make any sentences using my words miss because I am still confused with the using of the noun, verb, adjective, etc, because of that, I decided to use google translate to make the descriptive text". Furthermore, the other students also gave the same statement which stated that they have a lack English Proficiency.

3. Lack of interest in learning English

The lack of interest in learning English is one of the causes that make students' difficulties in writing descriptive text, it has shown by students' answers in the interview that they don't have an interest in learning English and it makes them lazy to learn this subject and never pay attention to the explanation that the English teacher gave. One of the students emphasized "English is difficult to be understood miss, I have no interest in learning English and I am so confused", another student who doesn't have an interest in learning English also said that English sucks, is difficult, and confusing.

4. The Factors of Intrinsic and Extrinsic

The English teacher elaborated that there are factors of intrinsic and extrinsic which are affecting students' difficulties such as the ability of the students, the background of the family, and the facilities that the students have. The teacher said "There are two factors that cause their difficulties miss, they are intrinsic and extrinsic based on the assignment that I always give it to them. In the intrinsic factor, the students have low ability and skill in understanding English lessons. And the last is extrinsic, this factor is from the student's family background and the facilities that they have.

Regarding the interview that the researcher conducted with 4 students and an English Teacher, the researcher found that there are some causes of students' difficulties in writing descriptive text, they are the lack of knowledge relating to the descriptive text material, the lack of English proficiency, the lack of interest in Learning English and the factors of intrinsic and extrinsic that affect to the students' difficulties such as the ability of the students and the background of the family and the facilities that the students have.

Based on the research result that has been explained above, the researcher found that there are 3 difficulties in writing descriptive text and 4 causes of students' difficulties in writing descriptive text. Based on the details that the researcher has been explained above, it can be concluded that the researcher's data documentation is in the same line with the result of Cut Santi Novita [4] that the student's difficulties in writing descriptive text were generic structure, grammar, and spelling.

And for the data of the interview, the causes that made students' difficulties in writing descriptive text, the researcher found 2 same causes with the theory of Graham and Haris, they were lack of proficiency and lack of knowledge. Moreover, there are 3 of the same causes that the researcher found which are in the same line with Ismayanti and Kholiq [9] those were because of the lack of knowledge that is relating to the subject of content, lack of English proficiency, and the lack of interest in learning English. In addition, the researcher also found another cause, that is the factors of intrinsic and extrinsic which affecting students' difficulties in writing descriptive text such as the ability of the students, the background of the family, and the facilities that the students have.

Furthermore, the research result of Sarlin [3] stated that students' difficulties in mastery writing the descriptive text as they do not interest in learning English subject has been proven by the researcher in this research that the lack of interest in learning English is one of the causes of students' difficulties in writing descriptive text, another research that is written by Aldini Fitri Adrianto. He conducted the title "A Case Study: Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text in The First Year Students at SMP Brawijaya Smart School (BSS) Malang. In the resulting point, one of the difficulties in writing descriptive text is the tenses used. here, Adrianto's statement is valid because based on the research experience in collecting the data of students' exercise, the research found that many students have difficulties in grammar such as the use of the noun, pronoun, conjunction, and the use of tenses of simple present tense.

Conclusion

Based on the result of students' exercises in writing descriptive text and the interview that the researcher conducted with the students and English teacher about Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text that Faced by the First Grade Students of SMP PGRI 16 SIDOARJO, the researcher takes conclusion that students have difficulties in writing a descriptive text on the generic structure, grammar (the use of noun, pronoun, conjunction, preposition, and simple present tense) and spelling and for the causes of students' difficulties in writing descriptive text are the lack of English Proficiency, lack of knowledge in descriptive text material, lack of interest in learning English and the factors of internal and external such as the family background and the skill or capability of the students.

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