Students’ Writing Error in Descriptive Text: Study in the Seventh Grade Students of SMP Negeri 4 Arjosari Satu Atap

EkaWindri Hastuti¹, Samsul Hadi², Dwi Rahayu³
¹,²,³STKIP PGRI Pacitan
e-mail: samsulhadio702106401@gmail.com²

Received: 12 Agustus 2023    Accepted: 25 Desember 2023    Final proof: 26 Desember 2023

Abstract

English, as an international language, played a crucial role in global education and communication. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language and is an integral part of the education curriculum. Writing in English is one of the essential components for developing students’ language skills, especially for students at the junior high school level. The purpose of this research was identified the writing errors made by students in descriptive texts. The study was conducted at SMPN 4 Satu Atap Arjosari Pacitan. This research used a quantitative research design. The data sources for this study were nine students from grade VII, selected through purposive sampling. The students’ descriptive text in writing test was used the primary data research. The research findings indicated that there were five aspects of errors in writing. The most dominant was language use, accounting 36%, contents 25%, vocabulary 18%, organizations 17%, mechanics 4%.

INTRODUCTION

English as an international language, played a crucial role in global education and communication. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language and is an integral part of the education curriculum. Writing in English is one of the essential components for developing students’ language skills. However, it cannot be denied that writing in English is often considered a challenging and complex task, especially for students at the junior high school level. Some students believe that writing is a difficult activity, as stated by Heaton (1975) in Kristy (2016: 4-5).

SMP Negeri 4 Arjosari Satu Atap Pacitan is one of the junior high schools in Pacitan Regency, East Java, Indonesia. As a school committed to providing quality education, the ability to write in English is a significant focus in the learning process. In grade VII, students are exposed to writing materials that cover various types of texts, including narratives, descriptions, and expositions. Despite receiving instruction and practice in writing, mistakes in structure, vocabulary, and grammar still occur.

Previous research has highlighted the issue of English writing errors among students at various educational levels. According to Fitria, T.N. (2018), writing in English is a complex and challenging skill, as students need to understand various aspects of the language, such as grammar, vocabulary, and text structure.

Moreover, the Error Analysis theory is also relevant in analyzing students’ writing errors. This theory, developed by Corder (1967), states that errors made by students in learning a foreign language are a result of their efforts to master that language. Students’ writing errors can serve as indicators of their level of language proficiency and can guide teachers in developing suitable learning programs to meet students’ needs.
A descriptive text is one involving clues to describe a person, location, or thing. It is used to create images of individuals, locations, or even time, days, or seasons (Masitoh, S., & Suprijadi, D., 2015). Furthermore, descriptive writings have a social purpose by defining a certain person, place, or item (Nuraini, H., Mulyana, A., & Aeni, L., 2019). While Gerot and Wignel (in Ismayanti, E., & Kholiq, A., 2020) claim that descriptive literature has the goal of clearly showing the reader the physical look of anything, it is possible to deduce from the definition of descriptive text provided above that descriptive text is a text that describes people, places, and objects physically based on their appearance.

In descriptive writing, there are seven grammatical characteristics, as follows:
1) When discussing a thing from a technical or factual standpoint, the present tense is frequently used.
2) Although the present tense happens to be used in literary descriptions, the past tense is more frequent.
3) Relational verbs (is, are, has, have) are used to categorize and describe the appearance, characteristics, and portions or functions of things.
4) Action verbs describe activities or functions.
5) Action verbs are used conceptually in literary and daily descriptions to generate effect.
6) Mental verbs are used to describe feelings in literary descriptions.
7) Adjectives are used to complement nouns and, depending on the context, can be technical, literary.

In reality, the ability to write in English at SMP Negeri 4 Arjosari Satu Atap Pacitan needs serious attention. Based on the researcher’s teaching experience at this school, it has been observed that grade VII students often struggle to construct correct sentences and express ideas coherently in English. Some common problems include improper use of tenses, inability to organize coherent paragraphs, and limited command of appropriate vocabulary. Therefore, this research aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the types of writing errors frequently made by grade VII students at SMP Negeri 4 Arjosari Satu Atap Pacitan.

METHOD

The method used in this research was quantitative with a sample of 9 students from grade VII of SMP Negeri 4 Arjosari Satu Atap for the academic year 2022/2023. The primary data utilized in this study were the students' writing tests. This method uses purposive sampling techniques. The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Arjosari Satu Atap, Tukul Village, Arjosari Subdistrict, Pacitan Regency. The research was conducted on May 15, 2023, from 07:30 to 09:00 in the morning. The data collection technique employed in this research involved conducting tests, and then the students’ writing outcomes were evaluated in five writing aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics, based on Jacob et al.’s (1980) theory. The results were then presented in the form of charts, and the last made conclusions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The findings indicate that students often made mistakes in the use of grammar. They tended to make errors in word placement, verb usage, and improper sentence construction. For example, misplacing verbs in the wrong form, subject-verb agreement errors, or misunderstanding certain grammar rules. Language usage represented the most challenging aspect compared to others. This was because language usage encompassed several components, and one of them is grammar. In the findings, there were numerous grammatical errors in their placements.

Some students also experienced errors in using the words “Has” and “Have”. In English, first-person pronouns (I), second-person pronouns (You), and plural pronouns
(We, They) use the verb “Have”. Meanwhile, third-person singular pronouns (She, He, It) use the verb “Has”. Inaccuracies in using these verbs could disrupt sentence structure and render sentences ungrammatical. The mistakes in using these words could also lead to sentence ambiguity.

The second error was related to content. Students encountered difficulties in generating diverse ideas when asked to describe a person or a place, and most of them opted to describe a person. The majority of students described similar things about the name and preferences of that person. Most students tended to choose to describe a person, and as a result, it became monotonous and lacked variation. The limitations in content could affect the diversity and depth of the discussion.

The third mistake was related to vocabulary. The test results showed that students used very basic vocabulary. They often did not use more diverse and specific words, which caused their explanations or writings to be less cohesive and appeared limited. The limitation in vocabulary could affect students' ability to express ideas and concepted accurately and variably. The used of limited vocabulary could also hinder students' ability to describe things in a more specific and profound manner.

Here are some things that can improve your vocabulary:
1. Read more: Read various types of texts, including books, articles, and news to enrich your vocabulary.
2. Use a dictionary: When encountering unfamiliar words, look up their meanings in the dictionary to understand their proper usage.
3. Learn synonyms: Expand your vocabulary by studying synonyms of common words so you can express yourself more diversely.
4. Pay attention to context: Ensure you use the right word according to the context of the sentence or conversation.
5. Practice speaking and writing: The more you practice, the more proficient you will become in using vocabulary accurately.
6. Ask questions if unsure: If you are unsure about the meaning or usage of a word, don’t hesitate to ask someone more experienced in the Indonesian language.

The fourth aspect is organization. The aspect of organization involves how students arrange sentences and paragraphs in their writing. Some students faced difficulties in constructing clear and coherent sentences. Sentences with multiple meanings or ambiguities. Arranging sentences in an irregular or illogical manner could also make explanations or writings hard to understand. It was important to have proper grammar and arrange sentences systematically to make the writing more comprehensible and well-structured. By avoiding mistakes, your writing would become more organized, easier to understand, and more effective in conveying the message to the readers.

Here are some things that can be used to improve errors in organization:
1. Always start with an introduction that introduces the topic, followed by the body that explains the main points, and conclude with a conclusion that summarizes the essence of the writing.
2. Use paragraphs as a single unit of thought with a clear main topic. Make sure each paragraph contains one main idea and the following paragraphs are related to that idea.
3. Review your writing and ensure that the same information is not repeated in several consecutive paragraphs.
4. Remove irrelevant or unsupportive information from the main message of the writing.

Last, the fifth aspect is mechanics. Based on the test results, some students still had difficulties in understanding the rules of using punctuation and capital letters. Spelling errors also occurred frequently, although this could be avoided by rechecking their writing. Mechanical errors could reduce the quality of the writing and gave an
unprofessional impression. Mistakes in this mechanical aspect could disrupt the readability and accuracy of the students’ writing. Avoiding the above-mentioned errors and improving the mechanical aspect of writing would help you convey your message more clearly, effectively, and professionally. Always remember to pay attention to these small details so that your writing has good quality and was easily understood by readers.

Here are things that can be done to reduce errors in mechanics:
1. Pay attention to the use of commas, periods, colons, semicolons, and other punctuation marks to make sentences clearer and well-structured.
2. If a sentence is too long, break it into several sentences to make it easier for the readers to understand.

Discussions
Several topics were covered in this problems, including students’ writing errors, students’ writing difficulties, and how students overcome these difficulties.

Composition for Scoring Writing (Jacob et al. 1981)
Content
In writing, this stage must be considered carefully. The content of the writing must be clear so that the reader is able to understand what is conveyed by the author. In addition, so that the information provided can be conveyed to the reader, that the writing can be useful for those in need.

Table 1. Criteria of Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30-27</td>
<td>EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: development of broad and thorough concepts, related to the assigned topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-22</td>
<td>GOOD TO AVERAGE: limited development of ideas and knowledge, most of the topics are relevant to those assigned, knows enough about the subject, lack of details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-17</td>
<td>FAIR TO POOR: limited knowledge of the subject, inadequate development of ideas, lack of details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-13</td>
<td>VERY POOR: does not demonstrate understanding of the issue, irrelevant, or is insufficient to be evaluated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organization
Readers will see how the writer organizes ideas in the order of messages in words at the organizing stage of writing. Writers use various techniques to organize this organizational writing, mainly known as discipline.

Table 2. Criteria of Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-18</td>
<td>EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: fluent expression, concepts that are clearly articulated and supported, concise, well-organized, logical in order, cohesive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-14</td>
<td>GOOD TO AVERAGE: a little choppy, loosely structured but with main ideas staggered, limited support, and logical but insufficient sequencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-10</td>
<td>FAIR TO POOR: not fluent, confused or irrelevant ideas, and lack of logical development and sequence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-7</td>
<td>VERY POOR: organization is very lacking, not enough to evaluate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vocabulary
According to Endarto, I. T., & Subekti, A. S. (2020: 72-81) vocabulary is one of the most important basic things in English language skills. Because the more vocabulary they know, the more proficient they will be in that language. When someone learns vocabulary, they are not only practicing vocabulary skills, but they are also practicing listening skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-18</td>
<td>EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: advanced vocabulary, skillful word/idea selection and usage, word from mastery, and suitable register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-14</td>
<td>GOOD TO AVERAGE: adequate range, few errors in form, choice, use of words/idioms, but meaning is not obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-10</td>
<td>FAIR TO POOR: limited range, frequent errors of word/idiom, choice, usage, meaning confused or obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-7</td>
<td>VERY POOR: many mistakes, and little knowledge of vocabulary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Language Use
In writing, the use of language must be considered properly. Correct language use helps to improve formal language skills. Grammar skills must also be adequate so as to produce correct and precise language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-22</td>
<td>EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: effective use of language, few errors in agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-18</td>
<td>GOOD TO AVERAGE: Effective but simple structure, few complex problems, some errors in tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, and prepositions, but meaning is rarely obscured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-11</td>
<td>FAIR TO POOR: significant problems with basic or complex structures, frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order function, articles, pronouns, prepositions and/or rephrases, deletion, and confusing or obscured meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-5</td>
<td>VERY POOR: almost no command of grammar rules, mistakes predominate, communication is poor, or there is not enough to evaluate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mechanic
There are three main parts of a written mechanic, they are below:
1. Capitalization
The use of capital letters in writing helps clarify the author’s intentions and convey information in writing. If a sentence is not properly capitalized, its meaning becomes unclear and can cause misunderstanding. In addition, the first word in a sentence using a capital letter indicates that a new sentence has begun. Capital letters also help readers to distinguish one sentence from another.
2. Punctuation
Punctuation is the key to writing sentence structure. Punctuation indicates that each sentence relates to the other. Punctuation marks are as follows: period, comma, apostrophe, quotation mark, question mark, exclamation mark, parenthesis, bracket, square bracket, dash, hyphen, ellipsis, colon, and semicolon.
3. Spelling

Spelling is a symbol that represents a word. In English, there are mostly twenty-six letters of the alphabet some of which consist of dashes as well as uppercase letters by Ryan (2017:11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: understanding of mechanics, mastery in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing, few mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>GOOD TO AVERAGE: some errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing but meaning obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>FAIR TO POOR: frequent errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, poor handwriting, meaning confused or obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>VERY POOR: poor mechanics, dominated by spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraph errors, illegible handwriting, or not good enough to be evaluated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Criteria of Mechanic

Students Difficulties in Writing

There were several difficulties experienced by students in writing, including determining grammar, finding ideas, making sentences, composing paragraphs, using conjunctions, and applying punctuation.

a. Determining grammar

The first students difficulty in writing was determining grammar. In grammar there are several components, one of which is vocabulary. The ability to remember vocabulary was very important to created a writing. Students experience these difficulties that hinder them in writing descriptive texts. They struggled because they had not fully memorized the vocabulary provided by the English teacher. The vocabulary they memorized was simple vocabulary. This was explained by the English teacher of 7th-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Arjosari Satu Atap during an interview with the researcher.

"Kesulitannya, mereka tidak menghafal semua vocabulary." (See appendix 10)

b. Finding ideas

The second difficulty in writing by the students was finding ideas. Finding ideas in writing is a necessary thing to do, without ideas in writing, students wouldn’t be able to form a sentence or paragraph. Some students explained that they ran out of ideas to write about; they said they didn’t know what to write. However, once they knew what to write, it was easier for them to continue to the next sentence until a piece of writing was formed. Similar statements were made by English language teachers during the interview. Students need to be guided by the teachers in determining ideas for their writing and guided in developing them to form coherent sentences and paragraphs.

"yang menyebabkan mereka mengalami kesulitan dalam writing yang jelas adalah ide." (see appendix 10)

c. Made sentences

The third difficulty in writing by students was made sentences. Like other difficulties, in made a sentence, one must master several vocabulary words to create a complete sentence. However, this study found that students also encountered difficulties with vocabulary. Additionally, students faced challenges in generating ideas, resulting in poorly constructed sentences. Because constructing a sentence also requires support from various other elements of writing.
d. Composing paragraph

The fourth difficulty was composing a paragraph. Students experienced difficulties in this aspect because they also faced challenges in making sentences. One difficulty could influence other difficulties, as the creation of a paragraph involves organizing several sentences. Thus, the issues encountered at the beginning become obstacles to the subsequent writing steps.

e. Conjunction

The fifth difficulty experienced by the students was conjunctions. Conjunctions were words or phrases used to combine two or more words, phrases, or clauses. Conjunctions were used to make a sentence smoother and more logical. In the students’ writing, some of them had difficulty in using conjunctions. They did not use the conjunctions correctly when explaining some words. Some of them changed the function of connecting words to the function of punctuation marks, such as overusing punctuation marks. As seen in the students’ writing, student 11 did not use conjunctions properly.

“she have big eyes, big nose.” (see appendix 7)

f. Punctuation

The sixth difficulty in writing by students was punctuation. Punctuation was an essential component used to clarify a piece of writing. The use of punctuation greatly influenced how a reader comprehended a text. If punctuation was used incorrectly, it would alter the meaning of a piece of writing from what the writer intended. In the students’ writing results, it was found that students had difficulty in using punctuation marks. Students misuse the use of punctuation marks such as how to use the correct punctuation marks, they did not use comma punctuation when explaining some things. Some students also did not pay attention to the use of period punctuation at the end of the sentence. As seen in the students’ test results, their writing fell into the “fair” category in the aspect of mechanics in writing. Below is one example of a student’s mistake in using punctuation.

“I have friend name is kiki he have long hair colours is black big eyes big nose” (see appendix 7)

Strategies to Overcome Writing Difficulties

There are 5 strategies to overcome writing difficulties, namely got help from a friend, asked the teacher, searched in the dictionary, read a book, and find a inspiration.

a. Getting help from a friend

The students overcame writing difficulties by seeking help from their friends. When student encountered challenges in doing English assignments, they assisted each other in completing those tasks. If one of the students didn’t understand the English materials, the other friends helped to explain. In the interview conducted with the students, one of them said that they often studied English together at another friend’s house.

b. Asking the teacher

The teacher was the most influential person in the students’ success in receiving English language material. The teaching method of a good teacher was highly appreciated by the students, so they enjoyed English lessons. Even though the students faced some difficulties in understanding the material, the English teacher patiently taught them step by step so that they could comprehend the material well. The teacher taught the material starting from the simplest, and then, once the students mastered it, the material would be advanced to a higher level. This is what ultimately made the students feel neither afraid nor hesitant to ask the teacher if they didn’t understand a certain topic.
c. Searching in the dictionary

Several students had their own dictionaries at home, some of which could still be used, were rarely used, or were already damaged, lost, or thrown away. Nevertheless, the school also had a library facility that contained usable English dictionaries. The English dictionaries were sufficient when borrowed by all seventh-grade students during English lessons. The English dictionaries would greatly assist them in finding vocabulary or searching for difficult-to-understand words.

d. Reading a book

The notebooks or English textbooks could help them overcome writing difficulties. The English textbooks they had as their reference could easily be opened by them. The English lesson notebooks would have been very helpful for them in overcoming writing difficulties. This was because the questions given by the teacher were ones whose explanations had been previously noted by the students in their respective notebooks. The teacher's method of teaching in the class was to explain the subject matter, then write down some important points about the material, and finally instruct the students to copy the writings into their own notebooks so that they could study independently at home. Therefore, if the students encountered writing difficulties, they could open their notebooks.

e. Finding an inspiration

The strategy used by students to overcome writing difficulties was seeking inspiration, which focused more on the content aspect of writing. One of the most frequent challenges experienced by students was finding ideas for writing. They had difficulty starting sentences or figuring out what ideas to put into writing. Therefore, teachers played a crucial role in assisting students in finding and developing ideas.

Based on the results of the students' writing test conducted in the 7th-grade classroom with a total of 9 students on May 15, 2023, starting at 07:30, students were instructed to choose two topics, either about people or places. Most students opted to write about people, including their friends. According to the test guidelines, students were required to write between 50 to 100 words within a designated time of 30 minutes. They were not allowed to open books, accessed the internet, or deviated from the assigned theme.

The results of the students' writing test showed that there were 5 aspects of writing, namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. There were 36% in the language use aspect, 25% in the content aspect, 18% in the vocabulary aspect, 17% in the organization aspect, and finally, 4% in the mechanics aspect. The results of the students' writing test will be presented in the form of a chart below.

**Result of Writing Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Use</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 1. Result of Writing Test](image)
CONCLUSION

Based In conclusion, English as an international language plays a crucial role in global education and communication. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language and is an integral part of the education curriculum. Writing in English is an essential component for developing students’ language skills. However, writing in English can be a challenging and complex task, especially for students at the junior high school level.

The research conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Arjosari Satu Atap Pacitan revealed that students faced difficulties in various aspects of writing, such as grammar, content, vocabulary, organization, and mechanics. Language usage, which encompasses grammar, proved to be the most challenging aspect. Students struggled with word placement, subject-verb agreement, and proper sentence construction. Additionally, the limitation in vocabulary affected the diversity and depth of their writing. Some students also faced challenges in generating diverse ideas when describing a person or place, resulting in monotonous and repetitive content.

To improve writing skills, students should focus on expanding their vocabulary through reading and using a dictionary. Additionally, they could learn synonyms and practice speaking and writing to become more proficient. Proper organization of sentences and paragraphs was essential to ensure clear and coherent writing. Students could arrange sentences systematically and avoided repeating information unnecessarily. In terms of mechanics, students should pay attention to the use of punctuation and capital letters to enhance the readability and accuracy of their writing. Spelling errors could be reduced by carefully reviewing and checking their work before submission.

Overall, addressing these issues and improving writing skills would enable students to communicate more effectively in English and achieve better outcomes in their academic and professional endeavors. It was essential for schools and teachers to provide guidance and support to help students overcome these challenges and become confident and competent English writers.

REFERENCES
Pratiwi, K. D. (2016). Students’ difficulties in writing English (A study at the third semester students of English education program at University of Bengkulu.