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INVESTIGATING STUDENTS' CHALLENGES IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS

¹Sugianto

¹English Lecturer, FBMB, Mandalika University of Education, Indonesia

Corresponding Author Email: sugianto@undikma.ac.id

ABSTRACTS	ARTICLE INFO
<p>The study aimed to assess students' writing skills and identify the challenges they faced in writing descriptive texts. Using a case study approach, the research followed a descriptive qualitative method. The participants were 28 second-year students from MA NW Nabi' Nubu'. The research employed writing tests and interviews as data collection tools. The findings revealed that the average score of the students was 69.92, indicating that their ability to write descriptive texts was relatively low. Three students (12%) scored below 60, placing them in the "poor" category, while ten students (40%) scored between 61-70, also categorized as poor. Nine students (36%) scored between 71-80, which was considered "average," and three students (12%) received scores in the "very good" range. When analyzing their performance in specific writing aspects, vocabulary and organization were rated as "good to average," while content, grammar, and mechanics were categorized as "fair to poor." In conclusion, the study found that students struggled most with grammar, content, and mechanics. It is recommended that English teachers provide more practice in writing to help improve these areas, particularly content and grammar, when writing descriptive texts.</p>	<p>Article History: <i>Received: 11th December 2025</i> <i>Revised: 23rd December 2025</i> <i>Published: December 2025</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>Writing, Descriptive Text</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

The successful students in learning English is determined by how well he or she can express their ideas in this language (Wallace, 2004 in Yenita et al (2018)). To support students' success, writing is one of the most important skills to master (Tillema, 2012). It was reported that Indonesia's Literacy ranked 60 out of 61 countries (Sulistiyono, 2016). This indicates that literacy in this country is in crisis even though writing has been demanded in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0. In this regard, many complain that writing practice and assignments for students in Indonesia are inadequate. This phenomenon denotes the necessity to keep on improving students' writing skills.

Writing performs as the central part of transferring any idea; it requires comprehensive information to create a text. According to Klimova (2013), mastering writing requires the learners to use metacognitive and cognitive skills, which means they need to arrange writing goals structurally and its necessities as supporting sources during the writing process. Writing is crucial to conveying the message and can be improved through practice (Kaiser, 2016). There are many references and a wide area of sources that allow the learners to explore the information before creating writing; hence, English writing becomes

interesting to learn as part of English learning process. A good writing skill involves comprehension and application of new knowledge by utilizing critical thinking while composing the writing idea (Defazio et al., 2010). Therefore, to produce a piece of good writing, students were required to understand the idea before and after the writing process.

In writing, a good idea is essential in order to produce a composition or written material (Syamsuri, Muhsin & Nurmayani, 2016). If students do not have ideas, they will get bored and disinterested in writing. For writing subject, students must have ideas about what they will write and how far they know about the topic sometimes they have to choose one theme and then decide on one topic, finding the appropriate word to express an idea (Anderson & Anderson, 1997 in Muhsin, 2017).

The descriptive text presents the audience through their senses and imagination about the meaning and description of something (Siregar & Dongoran, 2020). The writer of descriptive text tends to give the best explanation through physical sense to obtain the information in detail. Gerot and Wignell (1994), as cited in Rojiyah (2017), mention that part of the descriptive text consists of social function, generic structures, grammatical features, and purpose. The social function means to describe a person, place, or thing. The generic structures are related to identification and description. The grammar usage in descriptive is simple present tense.

In writing a descriptive text, a paragraph should achieve coherence when the sentences proceed in a sequence that supports one point at a time. For example, when a student wants to describe about his past experience, then he or she should have background knowledge about his or her experience such as when and where did the event happened. However, students still have difficulty in writing. Among others are low interest, lack ability, structure, vocabulary and punctuation as well as producing coherent, fluent and extended a piece of writing (Misbah et al, 2017).

According to Kurnia and Kareviati (2021), descriptive writing means describing something through words that the readers can understand by portraying someone, place, or thing related to the learners' life. The descriptive text has two parts: identification of how to introduce a person and description of something based on the writer's description (Kurnia & Kareviati, 2021). Presenting something through descriptive text engages readers to imagine it. The writing descriptive text process is similar to the artist who creates something that the audience can see clearly (Taufikurohman, 2018). It means the descriptive text should let the readers know what was being described in a detailed explanation. It was also stated that writing a descriptive text is bound to the objective and significance of the structures (Noprianto, 2017).

In writing descriptive texts, the students encountered several challenges. First, they struggled with generating enough original ideas to compose their own text and often resorted to copying and pasting from the internet, leading to plagiarism. They had difficulty developing their thoughts into paragraphs based on their own ideas. Second, the students were unsure how to structure their ideas into a logical sequence of sentences and organize them into a coherent and chronological paragraph. They also lacked proficiency in using appropriate vocabulary and mastering grammar. The final issue was related to their difficulty with spelling and punctuation. These problems were exacerbated by the classroom

environment, where the writing lessons were perceived as dull because they were solely conducted in the classroom without engaging, interactive elements.

The most difficult task to do in language learning is to produce a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing, which even more challenging for second language learners. The students had low interest in learning writing and lack ability when write their ideas with the use of correct language use, vocabulary, and punctuation to compose English sentences into readable and acceptable text (Nunan, 2003 in Khoiri, J. H 2020).

A related study by Hariyadi et al. (2018) found that 18 students (55%) were categorized as good, 9 students (27%) as excellent, 5 students (15%) as satisfactory, and 1 student (about 3%) as unsatisfactory in their ability to write descriptive texts. The study concluded that the ability of tenth-grade students at SMAN 11 Jambi to write descriptive texts was generally good. Another study by Siahaan (2013) found that while some students were able to write descriptive texts with the correct semantic structure and appropriate linguistic features, others still faced difficulties. This highlighted the need for further improvement in their writing skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, as it seeks to explore participants' lived experiences within their natural contexts concerning the issues under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research utilizes a case study design with a descriptive orientation, concentrating on a specific phenomenon within the school environment. The primary objective is to describe the case comprehensively and examine the influence of individuals on educational processes. Furthermore, the case study approach facilitates the acquisition of rich, in-depth data that enhance the understanding of the issues being examined (Creswell, 2014). The study focuses on students' performance in writing descriptive texts and the challenges they encounter in English language writing. It aims to provide an objective analysis of students' writing competence across five dimensions: vocabulary, mechanics, content, grammar, and organization. The participants consisted of 28 second-year students at MA NW Nabi' Nubu', including 7 male and 21 female students. Data were gathered through observation, writing tests, interviews, and documentation. The analysis was conducted by evaluating students' descriptive writing performance according to the five established aspects: content, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and organization. Additionally, interviews with students and the teacher were employed to obtain deeper insights into students' proficiency and challenges in composing descriptive texts.

RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the students' writing assessments reflect their overall proficiency in composing descriptive texts. From the analysis of 28 second-year students at MA NW Nabi' Nubu', it was revealed that 10 students (40%) fell into the poor category, 9 students (36%) were classified as average, 4 students (16%) as very poor, and 2 students (8%) as very good.

The evaluation of the students' descriptive writing performance was conducted based on five key aspects: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. A detailed summary of these results is displayed in the following table.

1
Table 1. Students's Score in Writing Descriptive Text

No	Students	Vocabulary (20)	Mechanic (5)	Organization (20)	Grammar (25)	Content (30)	Total Score (100)
1.	A	18	4	17	20	25	84
2.	B	17	4	17	22	24	84
3.	C	18	4	19	20	24	85
4.	D	16	4	16	17	19	72
5.	E	16	4	17	17	19	73
6.	F	18	4	17	18	22	79
7.	G	18	4	18	20	24	84
8.	H	16	3	17	17	19	72
9.	I	18	4	17	17	22	78
10.	J	17	4	17	18	22	78
11.	K	17	4	16	17	20	74
12.	L	16	3	16	17	20	72
13.	M	14	3	14	17	16	64
14.	N	15	4	16	17	18	70
15.	O	14	3	14	16	15	62
16.	P	15	3	15	17	18	68
17.	Q	15	3	14	17	17	66
18.	R	15	3	14	15	16	63
19.	S	15	3	15	16	17	66
20.	T	15	3	16	21	18	73
						Total Score	1.467
						Mean Score	73

Based on the table above, there are three students who have a very good score as well as three students who have very poor score. Besides, there were ten students who have poor level and nine students have the average level. Finally, the mean score of the students were 70. The following table showed the students' achievement in writing descriptive text.

1
Table 2. Students' Score Level

Score	Level	Frequency	Percentage
91 - 100	Excellent	0	0%
81 - 90	Very good	4	20 %
71 - 80	average	9	45 %
61 - 70	Poor	7	35 %
Below 60	Very poor	0	0 %
Total		20	100 %

Rubric Score adopted by Heaton in 1998

From the score above, the analysis of students' writing score is 73. It was categorized to be good in average. There were four students (20%) got score 81-90 (very good), nine students (45%) got 71-80 (average), and seven students (35%) got 61-70 (poor).

Students' ability in writing descriptive text

Next step the writer analyzed the data in each aspects to find out which aspects are good and which aspects are weak. The students' ability in creating descriptive texts could be

seen from the total scores which the students achieved for all aspects. The results of the analyses were based on the Heaton J.B (1998) level. Futhemore, after to be more focus on analyzing the students' ability in each aspect or writing in terms of the content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanic. The analysis of each aspect distributed in form of table as follows :

Table 3. Content

Score	Level	Frequency	Percentage
30 - 27	Excellent to very good	0	0 %
26 - 22	Good to average	7	35 %
21 - 17	Fair to poor	10	50 %
16 - 13	Very poor	3	15%
Total Score		20	100 %

1

From this table, it showed the students' ability in writing descriptive text the average score is 19.75 (50%), and it can be seen from students' ability of aspect content is categorized as fair to poor..

Table 4. Organization

Score	Level	Frequency	Percentage
20 - 18	Excellent to very good	2	10 %
17 - 14	Good to average	18	90 %
13 - 10	Fair to poor	0	0 %
9 - 7	Very poor	0	0 %
Total Score		20	100 %

From this table, it showed the students' ability in writing descriptive text the average score is (80%), it can be seen from students' ability of organization was categorized as good to average.

Table 5. Vocabulary

Score	Level	Frequency	Percentage
20 - 18	Excellent to very good	5	25 %
17 - 14	Good to average	15	75 %
13 - 10	Fair to poor	0	0 %
9 - 7	Very poor	0	0 %
Total Score		20	100 %

From this table, it shows the students' ability in writing descriptive text the average score is (75%), and it can be seen from students' ability of vocabulary was categorized as good to average.

Table 6. Grammar

Score	Level	Frequency	Percentage
25 - 22	Excellent to very good	1	5 %
21 - 18	Good to average	6	30 %
17 - 11	Fair to poor	13	65 %
10 - 5	Very poor	0	0 %
Total Score		20	100 %

From this table, it shows the students' ability in writing descriptive text the average score is (65%), and it can be seen from students' ability of grammar was categorized as fair to poor.

Table 7. Mechanic

Score	Level	Frequency	Percentage
5	Excellent to very good	0	0 %
4	Good to average	11	55 %
3	Fair to poor	9	45 %
2	Very poor	0	0 %
Total Score		20	100 %

Based on the results presented in the table, the students' overall ability in writing descriptive texts achieved an average score of 55%. The findings indicate that the students' performance in mechanics was categorized as good to average. In contrast, the aspects of content and grammar were rated as fair to poor, while vocabulary, mechanics, and organization fell within the good to average range.

After evaluating the students' written tests, it can be concluded that, in general, the students' writing ability in descriptive text composition was categorized as good, with a mean score of 73. This conclusion is supported by the fact that most students were placed in the good category. Specifically, 3 students (12%) scored between 81–90 (very good), 9 students (36%) scored between 71–80 (average), 10 students (40%) obtained scores between 61–70 (poor), and 3 students (12%) scored below 60 (very poor).

A more detailed analysis of students' writing performance in the five aspects those are, content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics revealed that their abilities in grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics were generally categorized as fair to poor. This conclusion is drawn from the number of students who fell into that classification, which was higher than in other categories.

Among these aspects, content emerged as one of the main difficulties faced by students. Although some ideas were relevant to the topic, the supporting sentences were often unrelated to the main idea. Several issues were also identified in the way students expressed their ideas. Grammar was another major problem. While most of the students' writing was understandable, they struggled with the correct use of past tense, which is essential in descriptive text writing. For instance, sentences such as "When we go home, we buy bread. So, we return on foot" should have been written as "When we went home, we bought bread, so we returned on foot."

According to insights from the teacher's interview, students found grammar

particularly challenging. Many of them were still unsure about when to use the simple past tense. For example, instead of writing “We visited some places,” students tended to write “We visit some place.” Moreover, students struggled to distinguish between regular and irregular verbs, which contributed to frequent grammatical errors.

In terms of organization, students encountered difficulties in identifying and applying the generic structure of a descriptive text. While most students were able to write an orientation, they often failed to connect it logically to the subsequent events or the reorientation section of the text.

The teacher also noted that several students lacked proficiency in punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Many were unable to use appropriate punctuation marks such as commas, periods, semicolons, apostrophes, quotation marks, and hyphens, or to apply capital letters correctly. This weakness significantly affected the quality and clarity of their writing, highlighting the need for greater attention to mechanics in writing instruction.

Furthermore, the student interviews revealed that many of them found it difficult to use the past tense correctly in their writing. They expressed confusion about when to apply the past tense and past participle, and they also lacked confidence in constructing grammatically correct sentences. As a result, their writing often contained long sentences without appropriate punctuation, such as commas or periods. The students agreed that more frequent writing practice would help them improve their ability to compose coherent and accurate paragraphs.

The study investigated the students’ proficiency in writing descriptive texts and revealed that their performance was generally low, particularly in the aspects of content, grammar, and mechanics, which were all categorized as fair to poor. The students’ mean score was 69.92, placing them in the poor category overall. Specifically, twelve students (48%) were rated poor in content, nineteen students (76%) in grammar, and eleven students (44%) in mechanics. These findings indicate that these three aspects represent the most significant challenges for students, even though descriptive text writing has been introduced since junior high school.

One of the reasons behind these challenges is that writing descriptive texts requires students to follow the schematic structure of the genre, which includes orientation, record of events, and reorientation (Anderson & Anderson, 1998). Furthermore, students are expected to incorporate the linguistic features of descriptive writing, such as specific participants, circumstances of time and place, first-person point of view, additive conjunctions, material processes, and past tense usage (Gerot & Wignell, 1995, as cited in Saepulloh, 2020). Consequently, the aspects of content, grammar, and mechanics continue to pose substantial difficulties for students when composing descriptive texts.

A more detailed analysis of the five components of writing—content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics—shows that students’ performance in content, grammar, and mechanics fell within the fair to poor category, while their skills in vocabulary and organization were assessed as good to average. Specifically, 12 students (48%) were categorized as fair to poor in content, 19 students (76%) in grammar, and 11 students (44%) in mechanics. In contrast, 19 students (76%) demonstrated good to average performance in vocabulary, and 20 students (80%) achieved similar results in organization.

These findings suggest that students' overall writing proficiency remains low and requires significant improvement through regular practice and targeted instruction. This aligns with Tooley's (2009, as cited in Saepulloh & Salsabila, 2020) assertion that writing is an inherently complex skill, and there is no single correct approach to teaching it. Tooley emphasizes that the teaching of writing is a multifaceted process that demands diverse strategies, methods, and theoretical frameworks to enhance learners' abilities. Because writing is not merely about grammar and vocabulary but involves multiple interrelated components, teachers should help students understand that developing writing skills is a gradual and continuous process rather than an instantaneous achievement.

Based on the research findings, several key difficulties were identified among students at MA NW Nabi' Nubu' Kekait in writing descriptive texts. The results of both the tests and interviews indicate that most students struggled with sentence organization, mechanical accuracy, and mastery of grammar and tenses. These persistent challenges highlight the need for more intensive and structured writing practice to strengthen students' overall writing competence.

CONCLUSION

It was concluded that many students still face obstacles in producing well-structured and accurate descriptive texts. Problems were often observed in the use of appropriate generic structure, lack of sentence coherence, improper punctuation, and limited vocabulary. These factors collectively hindered students from writing effectively. Therefore, it is crucial for students to expand their vocabulary and engage in more frequent writing practice, both inside and outside the classroom, to enhance their proficiency in writing descriptive texts.

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