An Analysis of Students’ Ability in Writing Descriptive Text

**Berry Santrio Cipta 1, Ihda Husnayaini2, Zulfikri B. Rasuan 3**

1 IAIN Syaikh Abdurrahman Siddik Bangka Belitung

2 IAIN Syaikh Abdurrahman Siddik Bangka Belitung

3 IAIN Syaikh Abdurrahman Siddik Bangka Belitung

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **ABSTRACT** |
| **Keywords:**  *Writing ability*  *Writing difficulties*  *Descriptive text* |  | This research is aimed to find out the ability and difficulties of public school students in Jebus, Bangka in writing descriptive text. The method used in this research is descriptive quantitative. The researcher used writing test as the instrument. The sample of this research was the second grade of a public school in Jebus which consists of 30 students selected by using purposive sampling. The finding indicated that the students’ ability in writing descriptive text was classified into very poor. The students’ writing ability in content categories was 2,63, in organization was 2,09, in vocabulary was 2,93, in grammar was 1,75. And in mechanic was 2,33. They were all classified very poor. While the students’ difficulties in writing was language features of descriptive text which consist of describing object in detail, lack of vocabulary and grammar mastery. Therefore, the majority of students was found it difficult to write correct spelling words and create sentences. Based on the results, the researcher concluded that the students did not have good understanding and ability in writing descriptive text. |
|  |
| This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. ©2019 by author. |
| ***Correspondence:***  Berry Santrio Cipta,  Email: berrysc@gmail.com | | |

**Introduction**

A public school named SMAN 1 (public high school no. 1) Jebus is one of the schools that is located in Jebus, West Bangka Regency. This school is a formal school that teaches English as a subject for students, especially reading. English has been taught twice a week, with 90 minutes for one meeting, which means 180 minutes in a week. This school uses 2013 curriculum (K13). Based on the curriculum, the first grade students of SMA N 1 Jebus learn descriptive text. Based on the priliminary test in SMA 1 Jebus, the researcher found some phenomena. The researcher used written test. The researcher gave a task for the first grade of student in SMAN I Jebus. The students were asked to choose one of three topics to write descriptive text for 60 minutes. The text should be composed at least 100 words. Then the writer collected their writing and scored them on by one. The score was based on their appropriately using generic structure and simple present tense. Furthermore, the researcher found the following phenomena: 1) some of students are not able to express their idea in descriptive text well, 2) some are not able to write based on generic structure of descriptive text, 3) some are not able to organize their writing in generic text in their writing, and 4) some of them do not know how to write a text based on the text given by the teacher.

In writing descriptive text, the students have to fulfill the five component of writing, they are content (developing ideas), organizing ideas, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics. Developing ideas is the most important thing to the students in writing descriptive text. By the developing ideas, the students can make a good writing text and develop their ideas clearly in each paragraph. In organizing ideas, students have to identify the name of place and describe the detail of the place in the supporting paragraph. In grammar, students have to choose the appropriate and accurate words to express the ideas. In mechanics component, student have to use the good punctuation, spelling and capitalization. From the indicators above, it leads to the data description and able indicators helps the writer and the scorers to score the students test. From those indicators, the writers can see the student skill through their test and analyze it based on the indicator.

The researcher intended to find out students’ ability in writing descriptive text that is focused on (content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanic). The problem of this research are formulated in following research questions: 1) what is the students’ ability in writing descriptive text? 2) what are the students’ difficulties in writing descriptive text?

Writing is one form of language. It is like a set of signs or symbols that have specific purposes. Writing is the act of making up correct sentences and transmitting them through the visual medium as mark on paper. Writing is an activity to share feelings, opinions and describe ideas for specific ideas and it can help people to communicate each other so they can express the message to others (Elbow, 2004). Writing is one of important skills among four English skills. It is taught in each level of education started from Elementary school to Senior high school.

Troyka states that writing is a way of communicating a message to a reader for purpose. The purposes of writing are to express one’s self, to provide information for one’s reader, to persuade one’s reader and to create literary work (Troyka & Hesse, 2005).

Writing is a two-step process. First the writer figures out the meaning, then he/she puts it into language and figure out what the writer wants to say; do not start writing till he/she does; makes a plan; and uses an outline. Writing is a process which needs varying extents and in various ways, requires preparation, drafting and revising (Wishon & Burks, 1980).

Descriptive text is one of the genres in writing texts. Descriptive text is a text that describes the features of someone, something, or certain place (Görlach, 2008). A good description is like a “word picture”; the reader can imagine the object, place, or person in his or her mind. A writer of a good description is like an artist who paints a picture that can be “seen” clearly in the mind of the reader. It may tell about their traits of character or personality (Anderson & Anderson, 1997).

Descriptive text is a description about characteristic features of a particular thing. According to Hogue et.al., descriptive writing appeals to the senses, so it tells how something looks, feels, smells, tastes, and sound (Hogue et al., 2014). In addition, a good description is like a “word picture”, the reader can imagine the object, place, or person in his on her mind. A writer of a good description is like an artist who paints a picture that can be “seen” clearly in the mind of the reader (Warner, 2009).

The generic structure of a descriptive text are as follows: (1) identification: an introduction to the subject of the descriptions (2) description of features: describe the characteristic features of the subject. While the language features of a descriptive text are as follows: (1) use of particular nouns (2) use of detailed noun groups to provide information about the subject (3) use of a variety of types of adjectives (4) use of relating verbs to provide information of the subject (5) use of thinking and feeling verbs to express the writers personal view about the subject or to give an insight into the subjects thoughts and feelings (6) use of action verbs to describe the subjects behavior (7) use of adverbials to provide more information about this behavior (8) use of similes, metaphors and other types of figurative language, particularly in literary description (Jacobs, 1981).

**Table 1. Purpose & Description**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Purpose** | **Description** |
| To entertain | An amusing description of a teenager’s Bedroom |
| To express feelings | A description of your favorite outdoor retreat so your reader understand why you enjoy it so much |
| To relate experience | A description of your childhood home to convey a sense of the poverty you grew up in |
| To inform (for a reader  unfamiliar with the subject) | A description of a newborn calf for a reader who has never seen one |
| To inform (to create a fresh appreciation for the familiar) | A description of an apple to help the reader rediscover the joys of this simple fruit |
| To persuade (to convince the reader that some music videos degrade woman) | A description of a degrading music video |

Descriptive writing main purpose is to describe. It is a style of writing that is focused on describing a character, an event, or a place in great detail. It can be poetic when the author takes the times to be very specific in his or her descriptions (Newby, 2014). Descriptive writing is usually used to help a writer develop an aspect of their work, for example it is used to create a visual image of people, places, event of units of time – days, times of day, or seasons.

Anderson states that descriptive writing concentrates on thing (noun) such as a person, a place, and an object rather that the action (verb) that the thing (noun) participates. It focuses on some aspects of the writer’s personality and permits the writer to express his/her own feeling toward a given topic. In a description, writers often use spatial order to organize their ideas. Spatial order is the arrangement of items in order by space. Description is a style of writing which can be useful for a variety of purposes: to engage a reader's attention, to create characters, to set a mood or create an atmosphere, and to bring writing to life (Anderson & Anderson, 1997).

In the teaching of writing, the teacher can focus on the product of that writing or on the writing process itself. Making sure students see everything leading up to this final creation was worth the effort.

According to Swan, ‘writing is re-writing; that re-vision – seeing with new eyes - has a central role play in the act of creating text’. In their model, process writing is an interrelated set of recursive stages which include: writing process approaches tend to be framed in three stages of writing. First, if students want to write but do not have any ideas, try to write about incidents from their daily life, or childhood; to create a vivid character, and then writing about him/her. The prewriting encourages collecting ideas, which can happen in numerous ways: brainstorming, working in group or freewriting. Brainstorming is a prewriting activity with a list of ideas about a topic. Then, write down a list of ideas about a general subject or a specific topic (Swan, 2018).

Second, the drafting is viewed as an important and complex set of strategies; structuring (ordering information, experimenting with arrangements), reviewing (checking context, connections, assessing impact, editing), focusing (that is making sure you are getting the message across you want to get across), generating ideas and evaluation (assessing the draft and/ or subsequent drafts.

Third, revising is the core of process writing. It will give some advice to advance our writing. All good writers go through several steps of revision because they want to make their writing the best it can be.

**The Aspects of Writing**

In order to measure the students’ writing ability, there are some aspect must be explained. According to Jacobs, the aspects are focused on content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. They are explained as follows:

1. Content

Content refers to the substance of writing, the experience of main idea. i.e., group of related statements that a writer presents as unit in developing a subject. Content of the paragraph does the work of conveying ideas rather that fulfilling special function of transition, restatement, and emphasis.

2. Organization

Organization refers to the logical organization of content. It is scarily more than attempt to piece together all collection of fact and jumble ideas. Even in early drafts it may still be searching for order, trying to make out patterns in its materials and working to bring particulars of its subject in line with what is still only a half formed notion of purpose.

3. Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to the selection of words which are suitable with the content. It begins with the assumption that writer wants to express the ideas as clearly and directly as he/she can. As a general rule, clarity should be his/her prime objective. Choosing words that express his/her meaning is precisely rather than skews it or blurs it.

4. Language Use

Language use refers to the use of correct grammatical form and synthetic pattern of separating, combining, and grouping ideas in words, phrases, clauses, and sentences to bring out logical relationship in paragraph writing.

5. Mechanics

Mechanics refers to the use graphic conventional of the language, i.e., the step of arranging letters, words, and paragraphs by using knowledge of structure and some others related to one another (Jacobs, 1981). Meanwhile, Brown proposes five major aspects of writing that have to be required by a writer in producing a written text namely content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Content deals with thesis statement, related ideas, development ideas, and the use of description. Organization covers the effectiveness of introduction, logical sequences of ideas, conclusion, and appropriate length. Grammar includes rules of verbs, agreement, articles, pronouns, etc. Vocabulary includes intended information, attitudes, feeling, and appropriate words including prefix, suffix, and also idioms. Mechanics include the use of spelling, punctuation, citation of reference, and appearance (Brown & Lee, 2015). In this research, the researcher applies those aspects of writing stated by Brown.

A study by Kurotun found that high school students in Semarang were good in writing descriptive text. After collecting data, the percentage of the result, namely; students that got Excellent score was 25%, students Good score was 60%, students got Bad score was 5%, and students got Poor score was 10%. The writer concludes that most of the students understood in writing descriptive text (Kurotun, 2015).

Another one was by Siahaan. Her finding revealed that nine texts written by Low, Mid, and High achievers were analyzed in terms of schematic structure and linguistic features using Systemic Functional Linguistics. In low achievers were still confused in identifying the schematic structure of descriptive text. Moreover, the low achievers still needed a lot of improvement as they still made a lot of mistakes in the text they wrote. On the other hand, it was also revealed that the middle achievers show their good control about the schematic structure of descriptive text. They also show their capacity in applying the linguistic features of descriptive text in the text they wrote. Different from low and middle achievers, high achievers show greater ability in writing. They also show their capacity in applying the linguistic features of descriptive text (Siahaan, 2013).

A study by Mardiyah revealed that students’ ability of Junior High School in Canduang were still confused in using structure and grammar on the text. She investigated the students’ ability based on their using structure and grammar error on writing descriptive text (Mardiyah, Saun, & Refnaldi, 2013).

**Method**

This research was descriptive study, which had only one variable. Tavakoli explained that descriptive research is an investigation that provided a picture of a phenomenon or intervention (Tavakoli, 2012). The researcher used descriptive method to analyze students’ ability in writing descriptive text. The researcher described the students’ ability in writing descriptive text by using percentage of students’ ability. This research had one variable that was the students’ ability in writing descriptive text at the tenth grade students of SMA N 1 Jebus. Therefore, this study analyzed the students’ ability in writing descriptive text.

Sample is subject of people and items from a larger population that we collect and analyze to make inferences (Creswell, 2002). Since the population is too large to be all taken as sample of the research, the researcher used purposive sampling because the English teacher suggested the researcher to choose one class. Besides that, this class had good ability in writing especially in descriptive text. Most of them are able to write with good idea, grammar, organization, vocabulary, and mechanics. The total number of samples was 30 students. In collecting the data, the researcher used test. The researcher used written test as instrument. The test administered to 30 students of the tenth grade of SMA N 1 Jebus. The written test of descriptive text is to find out of the students’ ability in writing descriptive text. The test is one instruction that ask students to write about descriptive text the topics of descriptive text are my friend, and my favorite teacher. The researcher asks the students to write a short of descriptive text. They had to make it in two paragraphs in about 60 minutes.

To know whether the data are valid or not, the researcher use content validity. According to Sugiyono, content validity is used to measure achievement of the students (Sugiyono, 2013). The test must be created based on appropriate material; it is easy to be comprehended or suitable with students’ level. The test of the research was appropriate to students’ difficulties and it was familiar materials to the students’ daily life. In this research, the researcher uses the material test base on textbook that the students learned. It was descriptive text.

2) Reliability of Test

Creswell stated that reliability means that scores from an instrument are stable and consistent (Creswell, 2002). Henning explained that if rating of students’ result of the test is rated by two or more judges or raters, the correlation between raters should be inter correlated. He adds that inter-rater reliability is a method of estimating the reliability of independent ratings.

According to Cohen, the guidelines for reliability is as follows:

**Table 2. Category of Reliability**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No | Reliability | Category |
| 1 | >0.90 | Very highly reliable |
| 2 | 0.80-0.90 | Highly reliable |
| 3 | 0.70-0.79 | Reliable |
| 4 | 0.60-0.69 | Minimally reliable |
| 5 | <0.60 | Unacceptably low reliability |

Thus, to determine the reliability of the test in this research, the researcher uses inter-rater reliability formula because the researcher uses two raters in analyzing ability of the students writing.

**Table 3. Reliability of test**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Cronbach's  Alpha | N of Items |
| .733 | 2 |

The reliability value of the test was 0,733. It was categorized into reliable level.

The data were analyzed by using descriptive method. This technique is called descriptive quantitative. The researcher found out the frequency students’ Ability in writing descriptive text.

The researcher found out the students mean score by using the following formula:

X=

Note:

X : the sum of all the score

N : number of subject in particular group, (Gay, 1981: 298).

According to Reid (1993: 235) as cited in Purwati (2016) state that the evalua-tion which using analytic method elaborate writing product into five components. They are content, form organization, vocabulary or style, language use or grammar and mechanic. Those component is used to decide the criteria of scoring in writing. The criteria are

**Table 4. Crieteria of Writing Scoring**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No | Score | Criteria |
| 1 | 91-100 | Excellent |
| 2 | 81-90 | Very good |
| 3 | 71-80 | Good |
| 4 | 61-70 | Fair |
| 5 | 51-60 | Poor |
| 6 | <50 | Very poor |

**Results and Discussions**

1. **Students ability in writing descriptive text**
2. **Content**

The result of the test was processed into the table, can be seen clearly in the following table:

**Table 5. Students Ability in Content Categories in Writing Descriptive Text**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Categories** | **Mean score** | **Criteria** |
| Content | 2.63 | Very poor |
| Organization | 2.09 | Very poor |
| Vocabulary | 2.93 | Very poor |
| Grammar | 1.75 | Very poor |
| Mechanic | 2,33 | Very poor |

The result of students’ ability in content categories in writing descriptive text was classified as very poor. In content categories, the students mean score was 2.63 or classified as very poor. They were not show knowledge of subject, non-substantive, or no enough to evaluate.

The result of students’ ability in organization categories in writing descriptive text was classified as very poor. In content categories, the students’ mean score was 2.09 or classified as very poor. They were not communicate, no organization, or not enough to evaluate and they still confused to manage or put their idea into organization.

The result of students’ ability in vocabulary categories in writing descriptive text was classified as very poor. In content categories, the students mean score was 2.93 or classified as very poor. It happens because most of the students had less vocabulary, so they did not know to make a sentence in writing descriptive text. It means that the students should be memorized more vocabulary to make their ability in writing in-creased especially for writing descriptive text.

The result of students’ ability in grammar categories in writing descriptive text was classified as very poor. In content categories, the students mean score was 1.75 or classified as very poor. The students’ ability was classified poor because most of the students made grammatical error in writing descriptive text. It happens because they did not mastery grammar. Most of the students still confused with using subject and verb. They still used present tense incorrectly.

the result of students’ ability in mechanic categories in writing descriptive text was classified as very poor. In content categories, the students mean score was 2,33 or classified as very poor. The students had classified poor because most of students were not mastery of conventions, dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation and capitalization especially using capital letter.

**B. Students Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text**

Based on the data analysis, it was found that most of students got difficulties in writing descriptive text. It shows by the result of students writing test that most of the students in each category was classified as very poor. It was proven by the data of mechanic category, the students’ mean score was 2.33 as classified very poor. It has dominated by errors of spelling, function and capitalization. And also the difficulties faced by students in writing descriptive text was using grammar. It was proven by the data was 1,75 that means the students had a very poor ability in using grammar (frequent grammatical for agreement inaccuracies). Because of lack of grammar, students were not able to write their descriptive text in a good form. Their lack under-standing about grammar made their writing became mess and their writing was difficult to be understood by readers

**Discussion**

After analyzing all of the data of the research, it is necessary to discuss the result of the study. The aim is to figure out the answer of the research questions. re-search question is “How is the ability of students in writing descriptive text?”. It can be explained by the result of students’ test. Based on the result of the test, the re-searcher finds out the students mean score, that is 12,5. This means that the students’ ability was very poor and need more efforts to improved. It means, almost all of students have the difficulties in writing descriptive text.

It can be explained by the result of the students’ test that there are some difficulties in writing descriptive text for students. The difficulties were faced by the such as description of the text and grammar rules. Moreover, the students’ obstacles are vocabulary and spelling words. All of the students have difficulties in writing descriptive text. In addition, the students were not creative in writing descriptive text, as result their writing is monotonous.

In this case, the researcher also discussed about the research finding and com-pared with two previous studies. First, the current study compared with Hanafi (2018). The aimed of his study were to find out the students’ difficulties in writing that makes different with current study was not only to find out the difficulties, but also the ability of making phrase in writing descriptive text. It was different with the current study that the researcher classified the students’ ability in content, organization, identification, grammar, vocabulary and mechanic aspect. The similarities of the previous study with the current study was both researches classified the students’ ability as excellent, good, average, and poor criteria.

Based on the differentiation and similarities that was compared with the two previous study above, the researcher concludes that both the previous study and cur-rent study try to find out the students’ ability and difficulties in writing descriptive text.

**Conclusions**

As already mentioned in the first chapter, the aim of this study are to analyzed students’ ability in writing descriptive text in writing descriptive text at SMA N 1 Jebus. The researcher would like to conclude the data obtained in this chapter. There are some results to be concluded in this chapter;

Based on the analysis of the students’ ability in writing descriptive, the total mean score of the students was 12.5. It means that the students ability in writing descriptive text was classified as very poor. The mean score of the students writing ability in content categories was 2,63. It was classified very poor. The mean score of the students in organization was 2,09. It was classified very poor. The mean score of the students in vocabulary was 2.93. It was classified very poor. The mean score of the students in grammar was 1,75. It was classified very poor. And the mean score of the students in mechanic was 12,5. t was classified very poor.

The result of the students’ test showed that all of the students got difficulties in writing descriptive text. The students’ difficulties in writing descriptive text consist of describing object in detail and grammar mastery such as simple present tense. In addition, majority of the students are difficult to create the sentences and write correct spelling words. Moreover, lack of vocabulary makes them write a lot of repetition word in their writing.

According the result of the study, the researcher recommended some suggestions for improving students’ ability and deducting students’ difficulties in writing descriptive text.

The researcher suggest that the English teachers should be give the students more exercise of writing ability based generic structure and the teacher give more explain about how to use mechanic, vocabulary, and grammar in writing descriptive text.

The students should write a sentence, paragraph or text as often as possible to improve their writing. In addition, memorizing a lot of vocabulary and reading grammar book for deducting difficulties in writing.

The researcher suggests to the further researcher to analyze more deeply about the other type of students writing text. The further

researcher can also use the result of this study as reference to other researcher with different skills or subject.

**References**

Anderson, M., & Anderson, K. (1997). *Text types in English* (Vol. 2). Macmillan Education AU.

Brown, H. D., & Lee, H. (2015). *Teaching principles*. P. Ed Australia.

Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative*. Prentice Hall Upper Saddle River, NJ.

Elbow, P. (2004). Writing first! *Educational Leadership*, *62*(2), 8–13.

Görlach, M. (2008). *Text types and the history of English*. De Gruyter Mouton.

Hogue, A., Bixby, J., Hogue, A., Butler, L., Oshima, A., Curtis, J., … Meyers, A. (2014). *Longman Academic Writing Series*. Pearson.

Jacobs, H. L. (1981). *Testing ESL Composition: A Practical Approach. English Composition Program.* ERIC.

Kurotun, S. (2015). Improving students’ ability in writing descriptive text by using picture. *Bachelor), Walisongo State Islamic University, Semarang*.

Mardiyah, D., Saun, S., & Refnaldi, R. (2013). THE SECOND GRADE STUDENTS’ABILITY IN WRITING A DESCRIPTIVE TEXT AT SMP N 1 CANDUANG. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, *1*(2), 280–290.

Newby, P. (2014). *Research methods for education*. Routledge.

Siahaan, J. (2013). An analysis of students’ ability and difficulties in writing descriptive texts. *Journal of English and Education*, *1*(1), 114–121.

Sugiyono, D. (2013). *Metode penelitian pendidikan pendekatan kuantitatif, kualitatif dan R&D*.

Swan, M. (2018). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press UK.

Tavakoli, H. (2012). *A dictionary of research methodology and statistics in applied linguistics*. Rahnama press.

Troyka, L. Q., & Hesse, D. (2005). *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers. annotated instructor’s ed*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Warner, M. (2009). *Easy Text Types: Text types for students who have little or no experience of English*. Ready-Ed Publications.

Wishon, G. E., & Burks, J. M. (1980). *Let’s write English*.