

The Difficulties of Writing Descriptive Text for Junior High Schoolers

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ABSTRACT

During the current pandemic, some schools have to implement hybrid learning, where some students come to school, and some have to go online. After the teacher distributed the learning materials, several students enrolled in online courses still could not comprehend how they differed from offline ones. The research used the qualitative method. The data was collected from 33 students in the 7b class and ten selected students based on their descriptive English writing text. It is revealed that the students have achieved reasonable control in writing descriptive text. However, in terms of writing, some students make spelling mistakes, and tenses still need more understanding. The result showed that the difficulties of descriptive writing are spelling, tenses, punctuation, sentence pattern, pronoun, conjunction, and preposition. They must consider schematic structures and use the appropriate language. Thus, their text will be well-organized and understandable.

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1. INTRODUCTION

When the pandemic still exists in Indonesia, all schools require hybrid learning for students who attend school and online learning for those who do not. It forced educational institutes, consisting of instructors and learners, to move online, which they were still not used to (Henriksen et al., 2020). The drawback of implementing that format is that some students who take online classes sometimes still do not understand what the teacher explains. In addition, Shimkovich et al. (2022) discovered that employing a hybrid format is not always favorable for teachers and students. Students' motivation has a more substantial impact on the outcome of this format than it does in traditional classroom settings. Teachers and students must also have access to a dependable Internet connection and current technology. In the hybrid format procedure, it is advised to combine several teaching methods. Students who did direct learning in class better understood the material. Hybrid learning forced the teacher to teach in two different classes: an online and a separate class. The separate class is where the teacher must visit two classes simultaneously.

Yoandita (2019) found that 22 vocational high school students in Cianjur struggled to write English texts. Based on the observation, the questionnaire, and content analysis, the students have difficulty organizing and developing ideas in writing and choosing the appropriate vocabulary in the text. It is related to the condition in one of Sidoarjo's junior high schools. Based on the pre-observation, the students think hard about learning English. They find it challenging to write down word for word. They often made errors in their assignments. The difficulty of writing occurs because of some reasons, which are 1) lack of proficiency in text production skills, 2) lack of knowledge relating to the script's subject contents, and 3) lack of interest in learning English.

Descriptive text is usually used to describe objects in detail. Gerot and Wignell (1994) stated that a descriptive text usually has two main structures: 1) Identification is about how to introduce a person, place, animal, or things, and 2) Description is about describing an animal, things, place, or person by describing its features, forms, colors, or any related things. The descriptive text also has characteristic or language features, such as using adjectives, compound adjectives, and simple present tense. Some difficulties in the descriptive text are the inability to adjust the social function of the text, to write with a chronological schematic structure, and to fill the text with appropriate language features (Noprianto, 2017).

Xie et al. (2021) examined the use of Vlogs in learning media, especially for EFL learners. They found that the boost of social media gives new possibilities for these learners to practice writing English in a meaningful way. The participants are from a university and a senior high school in Guangdong, China, and have an intermediate level of writing, and have smartphones and experience with video making. The reason is to determine its effects on learners writing performance. According to Safitri and Khoiriyah (2017), the things that need to be considered when writing a sentence in paragraph form are spelling, punctuation, sentence pattern, tenses, pronoun, and prepositions.

When the teacher speaks to the students with unfamiliar words, she/he has to spell those words. If the teacher says a *fan*, for example, not all students know the spelling of that word. They may write *fun* because it has a similar sound to a *fan* (if it pronounces with an Indonesian accent). Therefore, the teacher must spell the word *fan* as f-a-n. Moreover, punctuation is also crucial for the readers' understanding. Punctuation includes full-stop, commas, apostrophes, or question marks. Punctuation marks are also used to find a sentence's meaning easily. The teacher also has to teach punctuation to students when they write a paragraph.

Besides, we must consider the subject and verb agreement in producing a sentence pattern. The verb may or may not be followed by an object. It means that the subject comes before the verb, and both the subject and verb come before the object. Tenses in English identify when an event happens or describes a state. The present tense is used to identify the current activity. Whereas the past tense, it is to describes an activity or situation that was over or ended. A pronoun is a word used in place of a noun or noun phrase. In general, a pronoun is used to avoid repetition. Preposition has been called the most powerful word in English. It is short and significant looking, but they have essential functions. Prepositions are always followed by nouns (or pronouns). After that, connective words show the relationship between the nouns following them and the introductory sentence elements: subject, verb, object, or compliment.

Trisnani et al. (2021) examined students in one of the junior high schools in Surabaya by using a short-animated film of students. The results showed that using a short-animated film with narrative text is better than before. The higher score in the post-test proves it. Qader and Arslan (2019) examined the effect of Flipped Classroom Instruction (FCI) on Iraqi EFL learners' writing skills. The participants are 66 students in the College of Languages English Department at Salahaddin University. The result showed that the student's writing abilities improved compared to traditional instruction methods, proved by collecting data using a hybrid method to discover reasons supporting FCI's impact on students' writing skills.

Analyzing students' text is essential to help English teachers determine the student's writing ability and difficulties. Understanding the difficulties of writing English text can help teachers solve students' writing problems (Emilia, 2005). Regarding the background, this study is to know the students' difficulty in producing descriptive text.

2. METHODS

This research used the qualitative method, which is the verbal description of its data (Wahyuni, 2012). This method can help the researchers to give in-depth analysis. In this study, the data are collected from 7b students of SMPN 1 Gedangan, Sidoarjo. The unit of analysis is the students' work in writing a descriptive text about family, self, reasons for selecting the school, and favorite things. The data is obtained by observing the teacher when conducting class activities. The researcher took detailed field notes, videotaped the activities, and performed document analysis. This research instrument is the student's assignment. When the teacher implemented hybrid learning in the 7b classroom, the researcher asked the students to submit their works. After that, the researcher selected ten works to be analyzed. The works were produced by 10 students who earned better grades and met the minimum proficiency requirements for the English language course.

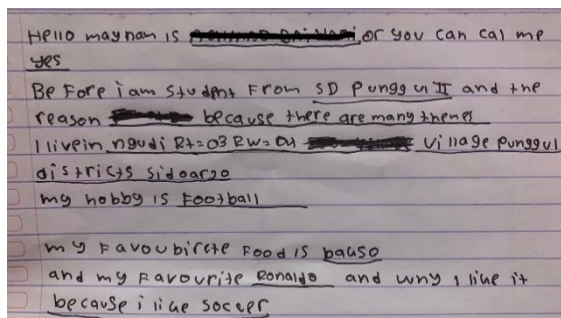
3. RESULTS/FINDINGS

Regarding the text analysis, the researchers found that seven of ten selected works have arranged the text systematically. The works consist of the main structure of a descriptive text. However, their texts have several errors, such as punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, grammar, personal pronouns, conjunction, and preposition. The researchers will insert the student's work in picture format and describe each type of error.

Text 1

The researchers found that the student tried hard to produce a descriptive text. The students' writing mistakes are missing punctuation, misspelling, incorrect verb, incomplete noun phrase, mistranslations, capitalization, and incorrect grammar. This writer did not use commas (after the words *hello* and *before*) or full-stop (at the end of each sentence). Three misspelled words (e.g., *may* > *my*, *nam* > *name*, *cal* > *call*, *favourbirete* > *favourite*). The incorrect use of verbs can be found in the second sentence. He used a verb *is* to explain the past event. Indeed, he should use an irregular verb *was*.

Regarding context, he mistranslated the word *teman* (or friends in English) and wrote *themes*. It may be caused by the similar sound of *teman* and *themes* in Indonesian. Take a look at the following picture:



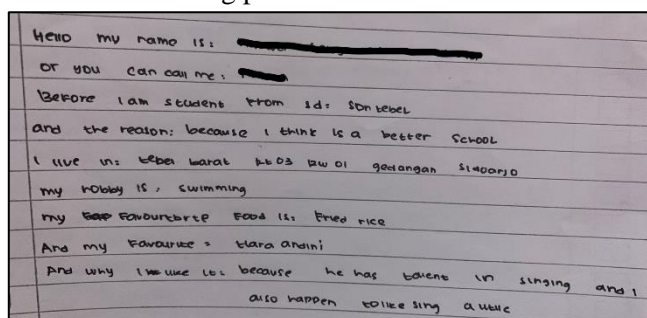
Picture 1. The Descriptive Text 1

The word *bakso*, which means *meatball*, is not translated. As the first letter in new sentences, the letter *m* in the word *my* should be capitalized. The writer must also capitalize the pronoun *I* in the last paragraph. He also used an incorrect pronoun. He used a pronoun *it* referred to *Ronaldo*. As we know, Ronaldo is a footballer man, so the pronoun should be *him*.

The last mistake is the incorrect sentence structure and grammar. The general structures of descriptive text are simple sentences and present tense. However, the writer created compound sentences and did not use present verbs. The sentence (and my favourite Ronaldo and why I like it because I like soccer) can be replaced with (my favorite *footballer* is Ronaldo, because I like *playing* soccer).

Text 2

The researchers found that the student has not yet understood descriptive text. She writes her text in a list. Some errors found in the text are punctuation, pronoun, incorrect sentence structure, and misspelling. Take a look at the following picture:



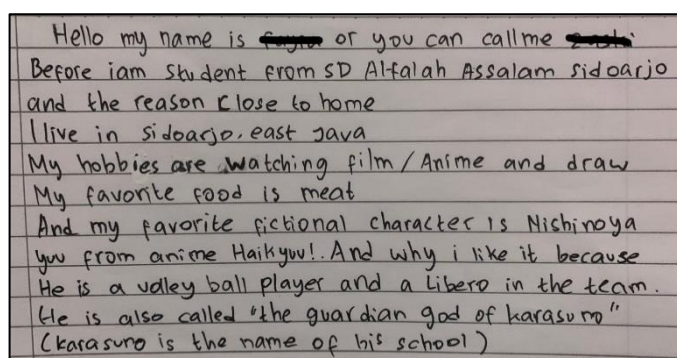
Picture 2. The Descriptive Text 2

In picture 2, the writer does not use commas after the words *hello*, *before*, and *Gedangan*. In contrast, she used a comma after the verb *is*. The writer used colons in every sentence. The colon is usually used in a list form, like the registration form. In terms of a text form, a descriptive text should be written in a paragraph, not in a list. The writer also used incorrect grammar, such as in the sentence (*I am student from sd: SDN tebel*). In this context, the writer had already become a junior high schooler, so she should use past tense to tell something that was over. The sentence can be replaced with (*I was a student from SDN Tebel*). The writer also faced difficulty using comparative or superlative degrees, such as in the sentence (*And the reason because I think is a better school*). She wanted to express her feelings about the current school, but she felt challenging to express the pattern.

Additionally, the writer misspells the word *favorite* to become *favourtorte*. She did not use the conjunction *and* to connect two things, but she used it to begin a new sentence. Also, she did not capitalize each word of an artist's name that should be written as follow: *Tiara Andini*. Further, she missed a pronoun *it* referred to a school and used the incorrect pronoun, *he*, in referring to the female artist. The last mistake is an incorrect verb. She uses the verb *happen* to explain an activity that she likes. Meanwhile, the verb *happen* used to say something that occurs unexpectedly.

Text 3

In contrast to the second work, this text is written in paragraph form. The mistakes are similar to the previous ones. Take a look at the following picture:



Picture 3. The Descriptive Text 3

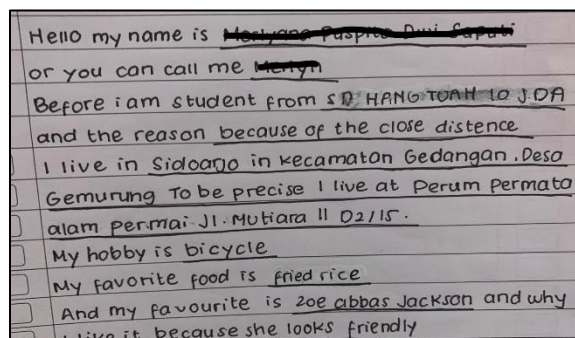
This student did not use punctuation, such as commas (after the words *hello* and *before*) and full-stop (to end each sentence). She also did not capitalize the pronoun *I* regardless of where it appears in the sentence. She repeated her mistake in writing the province name. She writes *East Java* in lowercase. Moreover, she used incorrect verbs twice. The first is the present verb (e.g., *am*) to explain her past, and the second is the verb *draw* which should be written in the V-ing form (*drawing*). The conjunction *and* is misplaced as well. It should be to connect two things. However, the writer puts that conjunction to begin new sentences.

Text 4

Similar to text 3, the researchers do not find a significant mistake. In this text, this student did not put commas and full-stop. She did not capitalize the pronoun *I* and used the incorrect verb *am* after it. Indeed, the sentence is about her past, so the verb must be an irregular form of (*am*) is (*was*). Also, she misspelled the word *distance* to become *distince*.

Moreover, she forgot to translate the word *kecamatan* (or *sub-district* in English). It seems that she

still translated the Indonesian word by word. In telling about her hobby, she uses the word *bicycle* to refer to riding a motor bicycle. It is not wrong, but it is better to use the word *cycling* as an act of riding a bicycle. See the following picture:

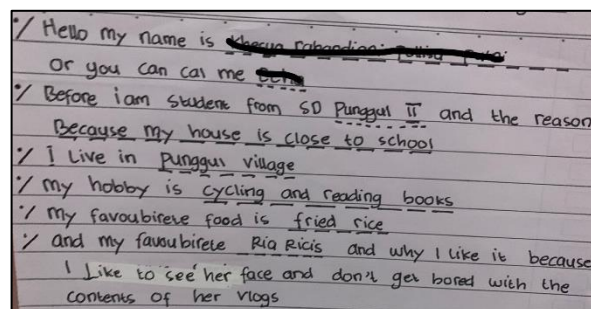


Picture 4. The Descriptive Text 4

The last two mistakes are the misplacement of conjunction and the incorrect pronoun. In conjunction, the word *and* should be used to connect two things, not to start a new sentence. After that, the writer used a pronoun *it* to refer to the female artist's name. In the English language, the pronouns *her* (refers to a female), *him* (refers to a male), and *it* (refers to a thing). Thus, the writer has used the incorrect pronoun in this text.

Text 5

The dominant mistakes in this text are misspellings and incorrect capitalization. Look at the following picture:



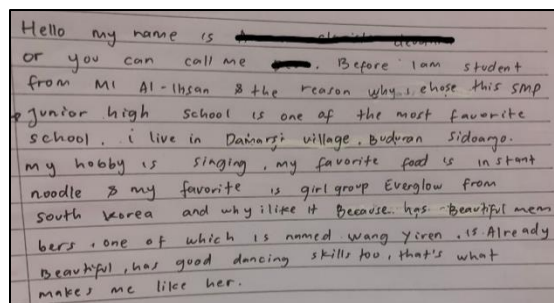
Picture 5. The Descriptive Text 5

In the first sentence, the researchers can identify the mistake in using punctuation. The writer should put a comma after the words *hello* and *before*. Another mistake is a misspelled word. There are two misspelled words (e.g., *call* becomes *cal*; *favorite* become *favoubirete*). The writer did not consider the use of capitalization. Several capitalized words are found in the middle of sentences. Like the previous ones, the writer also used an incorrect verb (*am*) to describe her past.

Text 6

In the following text, the researchers can find five writing mistakes: missing punctuation, incorrect capitalization, incorrect grammar, incorrect sentence structure, and missing subject. Like the previous texts, the writer did not use punctuation (comma) after the greetings word, such as *hello*. The sentence also seems run-on, although it can be split into two or more sentences. There is also

incorrect grammar, such as in the second sentence. In telling about her past, she must use the past tense. The use of the verb *am* can identify it. The writer has put the temporal conjunction (e.g., *before*), which means that the sentence is about a past event. Therefore, the correct verb is (*was*), an irregular verb of (*am*). Take a look at the following picture:



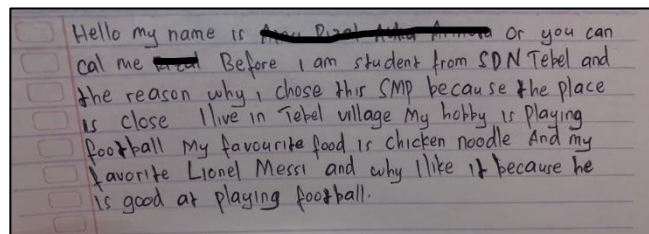
Picture 6. The Descriptive Text 6

The writer also did not capitalize the pronoun *I* and *My*, which appears at the beginning of new sentences. She made two sentences about her favorite, but one of them did not have a subject. She also did not use the pronoun *they* to refer to the noun “Everglow” members. There is also a problem in combining the sentence pattern, pronoun, and tenses. The word *which* can be replaced by the pronoun *them*. After that, the pronoun *it* can be replaced by the pronoun *her* to refer to a girl named Wang Yiren.

The grammar problem can be seen in the sentence *is already beautiful*. The writer could make a more straightforward sentence if she had removed the adverb *already*. This adverb is often used with the present perfect or past perfect tenses, not the present tense. However, the writer of this text has understood the form of descriptive text. It is the better one than the previous texts.

Text 7

This student has found difficulties in placing the punctuation. It can be seen from the student's writing below:



Picture 7. The Descriptive Text 7

The sentences need a full stop to end each sentence so the meaning can be more explicit. It challenged the readers to split the sentence because there was no punctuation in writing. Besides that, this text did not consist of commas or other punctuation. Moreover, there are two incorrect verbs (e.g., *am* > *was*, and *chose* > *choose*). The writer also used an incorrect pronoun. He used the pronoun *it* to refer to a male football player. He also put the conjunction *and* to begin a new sentence, not to connect two things.

4. DISCUSSION

From the results obtained in terms of spelling, it can be seen that there are still mistakes in writing words. The mistakes are in capital letters; some words are missing a few letters or are wrong in writing. In terms of grammar, most students still have difficulty writing it, such as using conjunctions that are not precise. The use of tenses still needs to be rehearsed, and in the use of pronouns, they already understand how to use them, and most of the questions given are about themselves and their favorite things. The results of students' work using descriptive texts are still good. They can organize the ideas to be written. However, some students briefly explain what will be described and understand what will be written based on the given questions regarding their name, where they live and some favorite things they like to do. According to Johannes (2021), students often struggled with producing descriptive texts owing to a lack of interest in the English language, which resulted in a lack of skill in text production and vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, the teacher used a few instructional media.

Prasetyawati and Ardi (2020) found that students have low engagement in writing classes because this activity is not connected with real life, so integrating Instagram into EFL writing is a new way to encourage students. The students are 45 first-year students at the English Language Education Study Program of Santa Dharma University. The data was collected through observations and interviews. The result showed that integrating Instagram into the writing class can encourage student engagement. Jayanti (2019) found that the students of VIII grade of SMPN 33 Padang can write descriptive text well. The five indicators in writing descriptive texts prove it.

Based on the research, students can adjust the social function of the text and what students write has a formal and informal impression in filling the text with appropriate language. However, there are some shortcomings, such as errors in spelling words. All students can say what they want at the end of the writing about their favorite things. In terms of chronological schematic structures, even though students can do it, the use of conjunctions or verbs still needs to be improved. McDonough et al. (2018) found that from 128 students in the medicine faculty at a university in North Thailand. The result showed that collaborative writing is more accurate than collaborative pre-writing, whereas collaborative pre-writing and individual texts contain significant subordination. Gharehblagh and Nasri (2020) examined the use of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning compared to paper-based instruction in Iranian EFL elementary learners' writing skills. There are 30 participants involved in this study. The result revealed that the participants improved on the immediate and delayed writing post-tests. However, MALL has outperformed the students in other groups significantly. Noprianto (2017) found that many teachers still have limited knowledge of teaching writing effectively in the classroom. Therefore, due to its strengths, the researcher proposed a discovery learning model to teach the descriptive text.

5. CONCLUSION

The document analysis demonstrates that the students have reasonably controlled the descriptive text's schematic structure. In writing, some students misspell words, and there is still a lack of knowledge of how to employ tenses. As a result, the student must think about schematic structures and fill the text with appropriate language in order to create a descriptive text that is well-organized and clear. Furthermore, the instructor might plan the following technique to assist pupils in solving their challenges when writing a descriptive paragraph. It was suggested that more research be conducted (if using the same research approach) with a large number of participants and that

alternative metafunctions be employed. It is suggested to see more evident and comprehensibly the students' ability to write descriptive texts.

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