An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Writing Narrative Text at SMA WR Supratman 2 Medan

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to search and analyse the difficulties faced by the students in writing narrative text which was done by the 11th grade students at SMA WR Supratman 2 in the academic year of 2023/2024. This research used descriptive qualitative method. This research involved 23 students and 2 teachers as the research samples. The data were collected from written test and interview as the instruments. Both written test and interview were analysed to gain the result. The written exam results revealed that the majority of students faced challenges in grammar, particularly with tenses. Following grammar, students struggled with sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation. The data also showed that students were not accustomed to do writing that those habits shaped students' opinion that writing is a difficult task. Consequently, students' lack motivation in writing. Therefore, researcher suggest teachers to firstly ensure students mastery in the usage of language features before moving on to writing. Researcher also suggest students to practice writing short paragraphs, then gradually progress to longer texts.

Keywords : Writing, Narrative Text, Students' Difficulties

INTRODUCTION

The international languages, English has a unique position among languages in many countries. It is a popular language that is widely taught and learned as it is used in many life aspects, especially during the 21st century. This phenomenon happens across the globe, including Indonesia. Learning English is now considered a necessity in the global community as so much important and useful information in human life aspects are mostly explained and served in English, such as business, science, health, technology, and so on. This is one of the main reasons why English needs to be mastered by many individuals including Indonesians.

It requires 4 (four) skills to be able to communicate well in English. They are listening, speaking, writing, and reading. While some students struggle with listening, reading, or speaking, some others find writing to be the most challenging.

Writing is a form of human communication that allows people to speak their mind and communicate their thoughts in written form using symbols and letter characters. According to Atkins & Carver (2021) in their book *Writing Is Thinking: Strategies for All Content Areas*, writing is a utensil that students can use to analyze knowledge, organize their ideas, and evaluate their understanding.

Klimova (2012) once mentioned that writing has a special position in language teaching because it is an acquisition of practice and knowledge in listening, reading, and speaking. Students need to reach a certain level of language proficiency to be able to pour out their ideas in written form, as well as to possess the ability to arrange those ideas into understandable text. This is in line with the statement from Richards and Renandya (2002:p.303) which mentioned that generating and organizing ideas are not the only difficulties but also translating those ideas into readable text. They stated that writing becomes even more challenging if the language proficiency is not strong as it takes the skill of planning and organizing. With such a complex process, students naturally

believe that writing is difficult and often appears to be an overwhelming activity.

Writing itself consists of several major types, such as descriptive, narrative, persuasive, and expository. Based on the current national Independent Curriculum, narrative text as a part of writing is a lesson taught in schools. A narrative text is a text that describes a sequence of events in the past with entertaining purpose. According to Mieke Bal (2009), a narrative text is a text where a subject tells a reader a story using a certain medium, from language, image, sound, building, or a combination of the mentioned mediums. Meanwhile, Rebecca (2003) stated that a narrative text is a text that connects a sequence of logically and chronologically related events which is caused or experienced by particular component.

Despite being a familiar material in schools, writing narrative text may not be an easy task for students. Harmer (2007:p.329) mentioned that some students have very low confidence and enthusiasm in writing. He also mentioned that this may come with some reasons: probably they have never written so much in their mother tongue language, or they think that they have nothing to say or can't come up with ideas. This often causes anxiety and frustration to students as they are also required to decide which language features to use to support the flow of the text. Purnomo (2023) also gave a similar statement which mentioned that students find difficulties in developing ideas, as well as struggling with sentence structure, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.

Related to this matter, some studies had been done by some researchers. To begin with, Muliani, Septha & Norahmi, Maida & Asi, Natalina. (2019) entitled "The Analysis of Difficulties in Writing Narrative Text" found writing difficulties faced by the ninth-grade students in SMP Negeri 11 Palangkaraya in the academic year of 2018/2019. The researchers took 20 students as samples and used descriptive qualitative as the research method. As for the results, 40% of the students found difficulties in constructing a generic structure. The other 50% students found difficulties in using language features, such as tenses, nouns, etc. In conclusion, language features appeared to be more challenging in writing than

generic structure to the students.

In addition, Falihah, Nova & Rahmawati, Eri & Baihaqi, Akhmad. (2022) entitled "EFL Students' Difficulties in Writing Narrative Text" also found difficulties in narrative writing. The research was carried out at SMAN 1 Ciomas, Serang. There were 32 students of the tenth grade involved as the samples. The objective of the study was to identify the difficulties faced by the students in writing narrative text. The research ended up finding four difficulties agreed most by the students, which are building correct sentences, using proper grammar, using proper vocabulary, and developing ideas. The conclusion of the study was students mostly found grammar and vocabulary to be challenging in writing narrative text.

Based on the previous researches, the researcher is interested in analyzing students' difficulties in writing narrative text. This research will be conducted on the students of 11th grade SMA WR Supratman 2 Medan in the academic year of 2023/2024. The researcher aims to find student's difficulties in writing narrative text as well as the factors that caused the difficulties. The researcher uses a qualitative approach with descriptive research design.

RESEARCH METHOD

According to Tenny S, Brannan JM, Brannan GD (2022) qualitative research, as the method used in this research, is a type of research that searches and supplies a deeper understanding of real-world problems. When things are difficult to be categorized, qualitative research is able to supply researchers with a way to comprehend what is going on (Grossoehme : 2014). The research design aimed to analyse students' difficulties as well as the factors that caused the difficulties in writing narrative text. present the features of or portray a picture of a situation or phenomenon where the subject of the study is not manipulated to determine cause and effect (Boudah.D.J, 2011). The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative

This study was carried out in SMA WR Supratman 2, located on jl. Brigjend Zein Hamid No.33 Medan, Indonesia. This school was established in the year of 1963 and has 570 students according to the latest data on the website of the National Education Data Centre. The researcher used cluster sampling as the sampling technique. Cluster sampling is where the researcher splits the population into smaller sections known as clusters and randomly pick those clusters to form samples (Thomas.L, 2023). The population in this research were the 11th grade students. Then the researcher took samples as many as 23 students. The 23 students consisted of 13 females and 10 males. The researcher also included 2 teachers as samples for interview.

Technique of Analysing Data

There are 4 steps in analysing qualitative data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) :

1. Data collection

The researcher employed a writing test and interview as data collection methods. Initially, participants took a writing test designed to identify and assess their writing difficulties. They were instructed to compose a narrative fiction text without a specified title, with a time limit of 45 minutes. The researcher supervised the test administration. According to Heaton as cited in Sinaga (2020), aspects of writing are not only grammatical and structural knowledge of text but also spelling, punctuation, and syntax. Yet the researcher focused on sentence structure, grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and punctuation. Interviews are beneficial tool gaining data from participants, and different kinds of interviews are used to dig into the participants' perspective (A.Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022). Among several types of interviews, the researcher chose to use semi-structured interview for gaining data from the samples. A semi-structured interview is more influential compared to the other types of interviews as it enables the researcher to dig up information and evidence from the participants while focusing on the study (Ruslin et al, 2022). A semi-structured interview enables flexibility and allows new

questions to be brought up during the interview session. Certain numbers of open-ended questions are asked to each of the students and teacher as participants. It is a one-on-one interview session and focuses on in-depth exploration.

2. Data Condensation

Data condensation is a process of data selecting, abstracting or simplifying the raw data that come up in the writing test and interview. After completing the writing test, the papers were collected for analysis and graded based on categories: Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. The researcher focused on evaluating three aspects: the content of the narrative, sentence structure, and language elements including grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling. The researcher also collected the interview data that had been conducted, and the researcher got to decide which chunk of data needed to be code and which chunk needed to be sort out.

3. Data Display

The writing test were analyzed to find the students' mistakes in the scope of the study which were the content of the narrative, sentence structure, and language elements including grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling. Meanwhile, the results of the interview were analyzed to find students' difficulties including the factors behind it.

4. Conclusion

Conclusions were verified by looking back at the data reduction whether prior to, during, or after data collection. Verification, the researcher had summarized the results of the research based on the issue and objectives.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

To gain the data to analyse, the researcher used written test and interview as the instruments. Both written test and interview were done in SMU WR Supratman 2 with the 11th grade students and English teachers as the samples as mentioned

previously. After obtaining the data, the researcher found the results to be as follow, including the examples :

A. Written test

The written test paper was graded based on the content, sentence structure, and the language features such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.

1. Difficulties in grammar

It was found in the data analysis that difficulties in grammar was the main problem and has the most cases in students' difficulties in writing narrative text. Most students found it hard to differentiate among tenses, especially verbs in present tense and past tense. Students started the story in past tense but tended to use present tense afterwards. Below are the examples taken from the students' writing test :

a. Student's statement : Once upon a time, there is a man named Toba. (written by J)

From the statement above, it can be seen that the student used present tense instead of past tense for the activity that happened in the past. Meanwhile, the correct statement supposed to be *Once upon a time, there was a man named Toba*.

b. Student's statement : One day, he's go to fishing and catch a golden fish. (written by W)

The statement above showed that students also tend to use present tense to express the past activities. To be grammatically correct, the statement supposed to be *One day, he went fishing and caught a golden fish*.

c. Student's statement : They married and Dayang Sumbi give birth to a baby boy named Sangkuriang. (written by M)

The sentence above explained about a couple who got married in the past time but student proceeded to use present tense to explain the next event that happened to

the couple afterwards. To make sense, the statement supposed to be *They got married and Dayang Sumbi gave birth to a baby boy named Sangkuriang*.

2. Difficulties in sentence structure

In the data analysis, sentence structure was in the second place in terms of most difficulties faced by the students. The difficulties are displayed as follow :

a. Student's statement : <u>He heard about the sad story of princess cursed</u>. (written by M)

It can be seen that the student had difficulties in composing the correct descriptive noun where the verb supposed to be placed in front of the noun. To make it sensible, the sentence supposed to be *He heard about the sad story of the cursed princess*.

b. Student's statement : <u>He looked for reason not to be angry with his father</u>. (written by G)

The above statement showed that student had a problem in composing the right passive sentence, which caused the meaning of the whole sentence to be completely different from what the student wanted to say originally. The correct sentence supposed to be *He looked for a reason so he would not be scolded by his father.*

c. Student's statement : <u>Ariel was painful deep in her heart</u>. (written by S)

The above sentence showed that student had a problem in arranging a grammatically correct sentence. She combined 2 adjectives in once followed by adverb. Meanwhile, the correct sentence supposed to be *Ariel was deeply hurt in her heart*.

3. Difficulties in vocabulary

Vocabulary was in the third place for difficulties in writing narrative text. According to the test result, students could not find the proper word during writing narrative text. As the result, students tended to use other words that may not be suitable to represent the things that they want to say. The difficulties could be described as follow :

a. Student's statement : <u>Fells like unliked by anyone, so the witch came with her anger to the castle</u>. (written by M)

The statement above showed that the students could not find the exact word to represent her thought so she chose to translate the sentence from Bahasa Indonesia into English. The correct sentence was *Feeling left out, the witch went to the castle angrily*.

b. Student's statement : <u>It's not playing how angry Dayang Sumbi was</u>. (written by M)

It can be seen that the student who wrote the above statement also did not come up with the right word to describe her idea that she also chose to translate the sentence from Bahasa Indonesia into English. Meanwhile, the right sentence supposed to be *It is unimaginable how angry Dayang Sumbi was*.

c. Student's statement : <u>Malin Kundang finally entered the adult age</u>. (written by J)

The third example showed that student did not have enough vocabularies that she used other word to express her thought. The correct sentence was *Malin Kundang finally entered adulthood*.

4. **Difficulties in spelling**

It was also found in the data analysis that spelling was one of the difficulties faced by the students in writing narrative text. Below are the examples of the students' mistakes in spelling :

a. Student's statement : a large herd of <u>elaphants</u> (written by S)

b. Student's statement : Malin Kundang was a <u>healty</u> ….. (written by D)

c. Student's statement : The lady <u>refush</u>…. (written by E)

5. **Difficulties in punctuation**

Based on the written test, it was also found that punctuation was part of the difficulties faced by students whenever they wrote narrative text. The examples below displayed their difficulties :

a. Student's statement : <u>If Bawang Putih did something wrong her stepmother would punished her by not feeding her</u>. (written by V)

The correct sentence supposed to be *If Bawang Putih did something wrong, her stepmother would punished her by not feeding her.*

b. Student's statement : <u>Suddenly he got a big golden fish</u>. (written by E)

The correct sentence supposed to be *Suddenly, he got a big golden fish.*

B. Interview

In this research, interview was given to both teachers and students. It was given to 2 English teachers and 23 students. The interview consisted of 7 questions for both teachers and students.

Below is the result of the interview with one of the English teachers :

No	Question	Answer
1.	Do your students like writing narrative text?	No, they don't.
2.	What are the difficulties that your students usually face when they write?	When they write, they normally have difficulties in grammar.
3.	In terms of language feature, how do you overcome your students' difficulties?	I will ask them to write their own sentences first then I will correct them on their paper by marking (X) where they made mistakes so they know and will learn not to repeat the same mistake again.

4.	What do you do to overcome students' difficulties when they cannot come up with an idea to write?	We, as teachers, cannot do much because I believe not everybody can write, not even teachers themselves.
5.	What do you do to motivate your students' creativity in writing?	Again, I actually cannot do much as creativity comes from the students themselves. It comes from their right brain.
6.	What kind of method do you use to teach writing narrative text?	I use CLT method where I usually ask the students about a topic, then I give out questions as a bait for them to write.
7.	According to you, what are the factors that caused difficulties in writing to students?	Nowadays, students are lazy to read. Their motivation to read has fall behind. Nowadays, they prefer watching to reading when actually reading is more important as it stays longer in our memory.

e.g. Table 1

When the student interview was given, some students mentioned more than one difficulty. As for the result of interview with students, it was found that most students (18 students) had problems in grammar, especially past tense. Students found it confusing when they had to switch and memorize the verbs in past tense. Many times, they would write the text in Bahasa Indonesia first and then translated the text into English afterwards.

In the second place, 9 students admitted that they struggled to write because they had limited vocabularies. They mentioned that it was very often that they knew what they wanted to write but could not find the right word to express their thought.

The lack of ideas came up in the third place. There were 9 students who mentioned that whenever they were asked to write, they simply could not think of an idea. This usually took a long time until they could think of a story to write.

Some students also mentioned about their difficulties in structuring the sentences. There were 5 students who reported that in many cases they actually had an idea of what to write but often times they did not know how to put those ideas together as a text. Students found structuring sentences to be challenging that it made them dislike writing.

The last difficulty mentioned in the student interview was punctuation. 1 student mentioned that she struggled to decide which punctuation mark to use while writing narrative text.

As for the factor that caused students to have the difficulties stated above, the data gained from this research mentioned that students did not have motivation to read. This may be the root from the habit of not used to read and write when they were younger. This phenomenon accumulated along the years that students grew into seeing writing as a challenging activity. Both students and teacher also agreed that students preferred watching to reading or writing. Teacher also mentioned that technology has grew very rapidly that it is very difficult to spot students' mistakes in writing as they might use the help from artificial intelligence or writing applications.

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

Conclusion

Based on the discussion, this research concluded that students had several difficulties in writing narrative text. These difficulties included, from most to least common : insufficient grasp of grammar tenses, limited range of vocabulary, difficulty generating ideas for writing, challenges in sentence structure, and difficulties in correctly using punctuation marks.

According to the data gained from the samples during the interview for both teachers and students, it can also be inferred that students did not develop early habits of reading or writing. This early experience has influenced their perception

that writing is demanding and complex. Consequently, students exhibit reduced motivation for writing and do not find enjoyment in the activity.

Suggestion

Based on the conclusion mentioned above, researcher would like to give several suggestions :

1. In terms of students' difficulties in writing narrative text, the researcher would like to suggest teachers to firstly ensure the students' mastery in the language features such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation. Teachers are encouraged to give practises and exercises in various ways before entering writing. Once students become familiar and proficient in using language features, they may find it easier to structure sentences while writing.

2. In terms of students' opinion that writing is challenging due to the least exposure in reading, researcher would like to suggest students to practice more of writing. Students might begin by practicing writing brief paragraphs initially, gradually progressing to longer texts as they become more accustomed to writing.

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