



Exploring Writing Difficulties in Recount Texts Among Eighth-Grade Students at SMP Nasrani 5 Medan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the difficulties experienced by eighth-grade students in writing recount texts at SMP Nasrani 5 Medan. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' writing problems. The subjects of this study were eighth-grade students. The data were collected through writing tests and interviews. In the data collection process, students were first given an explanation of recount texts and their generic structure. Then, they were asked to write a recount text based on a selected topic within a limited time. The findings revealed that students encountered several difficulties in writing recount texts. These difficulties were mainly related to limited vocabulary, lack of grammatical mastery (including sentence structure, use of nouns and verbs), and insufficient understanding of the characteristics and organization of recount texts. In addition, some students had difficulty generating ideas and organizing them coherently. These problems affected the overall quality of their writing. Based on these findings, it is suggested that teachers apply more effective, structured, and engaging teaching strategies to improve students' writing skills, particularly in composing recount texts.

Keywords: Students Difficulties, Writing, Recount text



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1. Introduction

English is widely recognized as an international language that plays a significant role in various aspects of modern life, including education, science, technology, business, and global communication. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, English serves as a global lingua franca that facilitates cross-cultural interaction and the exchange of knowledge across countries. In the context of globalization, English proficiency has become an essential skill for students to access knowledge, expand academic opportunities, and participate effectively in international communication (Rose et al., 2021; Zhang, 2024).

In the Indonesian context, English is taught as a foreign language starting from primary education through higher education levels. The teaching of English aims not only to develop students' linguistic competence but also to equip them with the skills necessary to compete in the global era. Mastery of English is considered crucial for academic success, as many scientific resources, references, and technological advancements are predominantly available in English. Furthermore, English proficiency also supports students in pursuing higher education and career opportunities in both national and international contexts. Therefore, the development of English language skills, particularly productive skills such as writing, becomes an important focus in English language learning.

In learning English, students are expected to master four fundamental skills namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are interconnected and mutually supportive in developing communicative competence. Among these four skills, writing is often considered the most complex and

challenging skill because it requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processes, and creativity (Hyland, 2019). Writing is not only about expressing ideas but also about organizing them coherently and accurately.

Writing plays a crucial role in academic contexts as it enables students to express ideas, share information, and demonstrate their understanding of a subject. According to Brown (2015), writing is a productive skill that requires careful attention to aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, organization, and mechanics. Similarly, Nunan (2003) states that writing involves thinking processes that allow students to explore and develop their ideas systematically. Therefore, writing is an essential component of language learning that should be mastered by students.

At the junior high school level, students are introduced to various text types based on the genre-based approach, one of which is the recount text. Recount text is a type of text that retells past events or experiences in chronological order (Dirgeyasa, 2016). It typically consists of three main parts namely orientation, events, and reorientation. In addition, recount texts are characterized by the use of past tense, temporal conjunctions, and specific participants (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). This type of text is considered relatively familiar to students because it is closely related to their daily experiences. Despite its relatively simple structure, many students still encounter difficulties in writing recount texts. Previous studies have shown that students often struggle with generating ideas, organizing events coherently, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and applying correct grammatical structures (Fareed et al., 2016; Toba et al., 2019). These difficulties indicate that writing recount texts requires not only an understanding of text structure but also sufficient linguistic competence.

Writing difficulties are commonly classified into five main components, among them are content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Students frequently face problems in developing ideas (content), arranging them logically (organization), choosing appropriate words (vocabulary), applying correct grammar (language use), and using punctuation and spelling accurately (mechanics) (Pongsapan & Patak, 2021; Purnamasari et al., 2021). These challenges are commonly found in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, including Indonesia. In addition, several studies in the Indonesian context reveal that students' writing difficulties are influenced by limited vocabulary mastery, lack of grammar understanding, and insufficient practice in writing. These factors often result in low writing performance and reduce students' confidence in expressing their ideas in written form. Therefore, identifying students' specific difficulties is important to provide appropriate instructional support.

Based on the explanations above, it is necessary to conduct a study that focuses on analyzing students' difficulties in writing recount texts. By identifying the types and causes of these difficulties, teachers can design more effective and targeted teaching strategies to improve students' writing skills. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the difficulties experienced by eighth-grade students in writing recount texts at SMP Nasrani 5 Medan.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze students' difficulties in writing recount texts. Qualitative research was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore and understand participants' experiences and problems in depth (Creswell, 2014). This approach is appropriate for identifying the types of difficulties faced by students and the factors influencing those difficulties in writing activities. The research was conducted at SMP Nasrani 5 Medan. The subjects of this study were eighth-grade students, consisting of 28 students. These participants were selected because they had already learned recount texts as part of their English curriculum. Therefore, they were considered suitable for providing relevant data regarding writing difficulties in recount texts.

The data of this study were collected using two instruments, they are writing tests and interviews. The writing test was used to assess students' ability in composing recount texts, while the interviews were conducted to obtain deeper information about students' difficulties and the factors causing those difficulties. The combination of these instruments aimed to provide more comprehensive and reliable data (Sugiyono, 2017). In the data collection process, the researcher first explained the concept of recount text, including its definition, purpose, and generic structure (orientation, events, and reorientation). After that, students were asked to write a recount text based on a topic of their choice within a limited time. This activity was intended to capture students' actual writing ability. Then, interviews were conducted with

selected students to explore their experiences and difficulties during the writing process.

The data analysis in this study followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of four steps namely data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and categorized relevant data related to students' writing difficulties. In the data display stage, the data were organized systematically in the form of tables and descriptions to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the patterns and findings obtained from the data.

3. Results And Discussion

The results of this study indicate that eighth-grade students at SMP Nasrani 5 Medan experienced various difficulties in writing recount texts. These findings were obtained from the analysis of writing tests and supported by interview data. The difficulties were categorized into five aspects of writing: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. These aspects are based on Heaton's (1988) framework for writing assessment. The students' difficulties are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Students' Difficulties in Writing Recount Text

| No | Writing Aspect | Description | Percentage |
|----|----------------|--|------------|
| 1 | Content | Difficulty in generating and developing ideas | 15% |
| 2 | Organization | Difficulty in organizing ideas chronologically | 19% |
| 3 | Vocabulary | Limited vocabulary and inappropriate word choice | 24% |
| 4 | Language Use | Errors in grammar, sentence structure, and tense usage | 26% |
| 5 | Mechanics | Errors in punctuation, capitalization, and spelling | 16% |

Based on Table 1, the highest percentage of difficulty was found in language use (26%). This indicates that grammar is the most significant problem faced by students in writing recount texts. Most students made frequent errors in sentence structure, verb agreement, and tense consistency, especially in the use of the simple past tense, which is essential in recount texts. This problem occurs because students have not fully mastered grammatical rules and often rely on direct translation. As a result, their sentences tend to be inaccurate and sometimes difficult to understand. This finding is consistent with Fareed et al. (2016), who state that grammatical competence is one of the main challenges for EFL learners. Furthermore, students' lack of understanding of tenses significantly affected their writing quality. Many students mixed present and past tense in one paragraph, which caused confusion in conveying time sequences.

The second highest difficulty was vocabulary (24%). Students showed limited vocabulary mastery, which made it difficult for them to express ideas clearly and effectively. In many cases, students used repetitive words and simple expressions, resulting in less meaningful and less varied writing. Limited vocabulary also caused students to struggle in selecting appropriate words to describe their experiences. Some students even used incorrect word choices that changed the intended meaning of their sentences. According to Nation (2013), vocabulary knowledge plays a crucial role in language production, and insufficient vocabulary can hinder communication.

The third difficulty was organization (19%). Students had problems arranging their ideas logically. In recount texts, events should be presented in sequence, but many students failed to maintain a clear order of events. Some texts were disorganized. It may be caused by students' lack of understanding of the generic structure of recount texts. Although they had been introduced to orientation, events, and reorientation, they were not able to apply this structure effectively in their writing. Hyland (2019) emphasizes that organization is essential for creating coherence and clarity in writing.

The fourth difficulty was mechanics (16%), which includes punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Many students made errors such as missing capital letters at the beginning of sentences, incorrect punctuation, and spelling mistakes. These errors reduced the readability of their texts. Graham and Perin

(2007) state that writing mechanics are important because they help readers understand the text more easily. Therefore, attention to mechanics is necessary in writing instruction.

The lowest percentage was found in content (15%). Some students still had difficulty generating ideas and developing them into complete and meaningful texts. They often wrote very short paragraphs with limited information. Based on interview data, many students admitted that they did not know how to start writing and felt confused when asked to develop ideas. It indicates that students need more guidance in organizing their thoughts before writing.

Overall, the findings show that students' difficulties are interconnected. Problems in grammar, vocabulary, and organization influence each other and contribute to students' low writing performance. These findings support previous studies in EFL contexts that highlight the complexity of writing skills. Therefore, it is important for teachers to apply more effective and interactive teaching strategies. Teachers can use techniques such as guided writing, peer feedback, vocabulary building activities, and grammar exercises to help students improve their writing skills. In conclusion, the results of this study demonstrate that students still face significant challenges in writing recount texts. By identifying these difficulties, teachers can design more targeted and effective teaching strategies to improve students' writing ability.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that eighth-grade students at SMP Nasrani 5 Medan still experience significant difficulties in writing recount texts. These difficulties were identified in five main aspects of writing, namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Among these aspects, language use, particularly grammar and tense usage, was found to be the most dominant difficulty, followed by vocabulary, organization, mechanics, and content. The findings indicate that students' lack of grammatical mastery, limited vocabulary, and insufficient understanding of text structure contribute to their low writing performance. In addition, students also face challenges in generating ideas and organizing them coherently, which affects the overall quality of their writing. These difficulties are interconnected and collectively influence students' ability to produce effective recount texts.

Therefore, it is important for teachers to implement more effective, structured, and engaging teaching strategies to improve students' writing skills. Teachers are encouraged to provide more practice in grammar, vocabulary development, and guided writing activities. In addition, incorporating interactive learning methods and providing constructive feedback can help students overcome their difficulties. In conclusion, understanding students' writing difficulties is essential for improving the teaching and learning process. The results of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically by providing insights into students' problems and offering guidance for developing better instructional strategies in teaching writing, particularly recount texts.

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6. Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. The research was conducted independently without any financial support or personal relationships that could influence the results or interpretation of the study.

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