

**EXPLORING THE DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE  
TEXT: ISLAMIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' VOICE****Dela Yuniar<sup>1\*</sup>, Siswana<sup>2</sup>**<sup>1</sup>dellynr112@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>siswana@uhamka.ac.id

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to analyze the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text. The design of this research is descriptive qualitative research. Tenth-grade students at one of the Islamic High School in Jakarta were selected as the respondents of this research by using purposive sampling. The data of this study was collected by using interviews and documentation. The result of this study revealed that there are four difficulties faced by the students in writing descriptive text such as understanding grammar (50%), limited vocabulary (30%), content (30%), and generating ideas (20%). Thus, it can be concluded that grammar and limited vocabulary were the most prevalent difficulties, followed by challenges in content knowledge and generating ideas. The findings underscore the importance of addressing these difficulties to enhance students' writing proficiency.

*Keywords:* Descriptive Text, Students' Difficulties, Writing

**A. INTRODUCTION**

Writing is one of the biggest and most important skills that language learners must develop, not only for academic purposes but also for their future professional lives. According to Hyland (2015), Writing is central to academic success and is a key skill for students at all levels of education. This indicates that good writing skills are not only important in academic contexts, but also an essential skill in various professions and everyday life. Nowadays, writing has become an essential tool for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to improve their proficiency level in English. As stated by Nation (2009) that writing is an activity that can be effectively utilized to enhance proficiency in other language skills such as listening, speaking, and reading. Thus, it can be concluded that writing is one of the English skills that English language learners must master (Ismayani & Kholiq, 2020).

There are various forms of writing, such as narrative, descriptive, recount, report, explanation, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, procedure, and others (Farooq et al., 2012). A descriptive text is a broad text that can be incorporated into another text. According to Husna (2013), descriptive text is a kind of writing that consists of descriptions characteristics, and definitions of objects or something. Moreover, Kane (2000) suggested that descriptive text focuses on sensory experiences, encompassing how something appears, sounds, or tastes based on one's perception. As a result, descriptive text is a type of text that provides a detailed description of something. The goal is to thoroughly understand the object

or topic under discussion through detailed description and explanation. In this instance, the researcher will concentrate on writing descriptive text. Descriptive text is text that describes everything about something in detail (Ratnaningsih, & Azizah, 2019).

However, writing is significantly more challenging than speaking, listening, and reading (Dixon & Nessel, 1983). Writing a paper necessitates the ability to use adequate vocabulary in the context of grammar that produces coherent sentences of various types, as well as the ability to select acceptable conjunctions for connecting sentences and correct the use of punctuation (Nasser, 2018). This might be a reason why the children had difficulty in writing English. As claimed by Harmer (2004) that children had difficulty with vocabulary, grammar, penmanship, and spelling when composing written texts. Moreover, Byrne (1997) proposes that there are three types of writing challenges: psychological issues, linguistic difficulties (vocabulary and language use), and cognitive difficulties. Additionally, Reid et al., (2003) mentioned that students' difficulties in writing descriptive texts are due to a lack of knowledge about the subject matter to be written.

There are several studies on students' difficulties in writing conducted by several researchers in recent years. Kristiana et. al.,(2021) found that the student's difficulties in all three aspects studied include linguistic, psychological, and cognitive challenges. Organization ranks first in each of these categories, followed by conduct, feedback, grammatical items, and vocabulary. In addition, Nurfidoh & Kareviati (2021) pointed out that there are five difficulties in writing descriptive text that supported that errors that students made are misordering, students made mistakes with punctuation, tenses, spelling, and the incorrect usage of prepositions. Moreover, Situmorang & Manurung (2019) revealed that the students' difficulties in writing descriptive text deal with generic structure, grammar, and spelling.

Given the explanation above, the researchers are keen to conduct a study to explore the difficulty students face when writing descriptive text. Accordingly, the researchers developed the following research questions for this study: What are the difficulties faced by the students in writing descriptive text?

## **B. METHOD**

In this study, the researchers used a qualitative descriptive method to investigate students' difficulties in writing descriptive text with a percentage of data. Based on Denzin and Lincoln in Emzir (2012), qualitative research is a diverse range of techniques and takes an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the subject being studied. This approach entails studying the subject in its natural setting and trying to comprehend and interpret it based on the perspective of those involved. The subject of this study is the tenth-grade students of Islamic High School in Jakarta. Especially X MIPA 1 class which consists of 30 students.

In this study, documentation and interviews were used as data collection techniques. According to Moleong (2007), an interview involves two persons exchanging information and ideas through question-and-answer sessions. Documentation is a wide spectrum of textual, tactile, and visual items, including what other writers may call artifacts (Ary et al., 2010). In documentation, students writing about historical places were analyzed. In the interview, each respondent was given the same questions, and the researchers wrote them down. The researchers interviewed only 10 students. They were selected by using purposive sampling techniques. Purposive sampling is used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information (Kelly et al., 2010).

### C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers conducted interviews with the students in Bahasa and subsequently translated the interviews into English. Through this process, the researcher identified the factors contributing to the student's difficulties in writing descriptive text. The interviews conducted with the students reveal several common difficulties they face while writing descriptive texts in English. Based on the data, it was revealed that there are four categories of students' difficulties including understanding grammar, vocabulary, knowledge relating to the content, and generating ideas. The following table shows the frequency and percentage of findings from the interview and documentation analysis of the difficulties in writing descriptive text:

**Table 1.** The interview results

No	Categories of difficulties	Frequency of difficulties	Percentage (%)
1.	Understanding of Grammar	5	50%
2.	Vocabulary	3	30%
3.	Knowledge Relating to the Content	3	30%
4.	Generating Ideas	2	20%

According to the data above, it shows that 80% of students who have difficulty in writing descriptive texts still lack an understanding of grammar, and 50% of students experience limited vocabulary. The other facts are that 30% of students have difficulty in knowledge related to the content of the written text, and 20% of students have difficulty generating ideas to create descriptive text.

#### 1. Understanding of Grammar

Following a series of interviews with various students, it emerged that many of them face difficulties in understanding grammar in the language they are learning. The interview results indicate that the following factors often serve as the main causes of their difficulties. Many students admit that they have difficulty understanding it as well as a lack of understanding of grammar and understanding of good and correct sentence structure. They may not have sufficient knowledge of grammar rules, including word layout, phrase construction, and the use of punctuation. The data from the interview are shown in the table below:

**Table 2.** Students' Voice

Students	The difficulties
S1	The most difficult thing for me to do is because I haven't mastered English vocabulary and also <u>don't understand grammar</u> miss
S2	My difficulty in writing descriptive texts is the suitability of writing about constructing sentences and also <u>not understanding grammar</u> and limited vocabulary
S6	My difficulty is determining vocabulary because I don't understand it and <u>do not understand grammar</u>
S7	The difficulty I have is deciding on a place to describe, <u>and not understanding what grammar is</u>
S8	For difficulties, I usually find it difficult to <u>determine grammar</u> because I don't <u>understand it well enough</u>

The data from the interview above is supported by the data from students' writing below:

**Table 3.** Students' Writing

<b>Students</b>	<b>Writing Text</b>
<b>S1</b>	Mount Bromo is one the most of popular tourist destinations in East Java
<b>S2</b>	Borobudur is located in Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia.
<b>S6</b>	Pangandaran Beach was a famous tourist attraction in West Java

In the S1 descriptive text on Mount Bromo, the student may have difficulties in constructing sentences. Difficulties in constructing sentences are very common, the use of prepositions "of" should be eliminated, or if she wants to use "of" can be changed its position to *"one of the most popular"*.

In the S2 descriptive text on Borobudur, there is an error in using the word, as in the previous example, the word "location" is a noun. It is correct to use the passive form of the verb "locate", which is "located". Then, the correct preposition to express location in this context is "in", not "at". "In" is used to indicate location in a more general or large context, such as a city, province, or country. "At" is more often used for more specific or small locations. So the correct correction is *"Borobudur is located in Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia."*

In S6, the students' difficulty in grammar is using "was" when it should be "is" in their writing. So, the correct correction is *"Pangandaran Beach is a famous tourist attraction in West Java"*

The finding above is supported by Ismayani & Kholiq(2020) that many students have difficulty in writing descriptive text because of spelling, grammar, and general structure issues. It is in line with Harmer (2004) that the difficulties experienced by the students in the written text are vocabulary, grammar, handwriting, and spelling. In addition, Kristiana (2021) argues that students' difficulties in writing descriptive text in three aspects of the study: linguistic, psychological, and cognitive.

## 2. Vocabulary

Based on interviews with students, it appears that one of the difficulties faced is the limited vocabulary. Many of them have difficulty finding the right vocabulary to use in their writing. This can be an obstacle in creating rich and in-depth descriptions. constrained vocabulary emerged as a contributing factor to the difficulties students faced in crafting descriptive text. Some students explicitly pointed to this as the primary obstacle hindering their writing process. The data from the interview are shown in the table below:

**Table 4.** Students' Voice

<b>Students</b>	<b>The difficulties</b>
<b>S4</b>	If the difficulty is finding a topic because I don't understand and also <u>don't master the vocabulary in English</u> because my vocabulary is very limited
<b>S5</b>	The difficulty is that it is difficult to find vocabulary miss because <u>I have limited vocabulary</u> and also do not know the content of the script that I will write
<b>S10</b>	My difficulties are <u>finding the vocabulary</u> because <u>I have limited vocabulary</u> and grammar I don't understand, and generating ideas

The data from the interview above is supported by the data from students' writing below:

**Table 5. Students' Writing**

Students	Writing Text
S4	<i>There is almost no visible rubbish scattered around</i>

In the S4 descriptive text on Dolphin Bay Tour use of the word "visible" may not be entirely necessary because the word "rubbish" is enough to convey that meaning. In addition, the word "scattered" may be replaced with simpler words such as "found" or "present".

From the data obtained, it appears that the students have the main difficulty in writing descriptive texts because they have limited vocabulary. The students stated that they had difficulty finding appropriate words to use in their writing. This can make them feel limited in conveying ideas and experiences effectively through writing. When they do not have an adequate vocabulary, they find it difficult to describe objects, places, or experiences with sufficient detail. According to a study stated that students had trouble with capitalization and punctuation, and they also had trouble with grammar, mechanics, and a lack of vocabulary. Additionally, it has been discovered that writing essays helps students become more proficient writers. As students write more, they become aware of the challenges they encounter and can produce writing that is of higher quality (Daulay et., al., 2023)

### 3. Knowledge Relating to the Content

Relates to an understanding of the topic or content under discussion or written about. In this sense, it refers to students understanding of the information or topic on which they must write descriptive writing. The data from the interview are shown in the table below:

**Table 6. Students' Voice**

Students	The difficulties
S3	The difficulty I encountered in writing the descriptive text was that <u>I had a little difficulty describing the object</u> and I had a little difficulty composing each sentence
S4	My difficulty is <u>finding a topic</u> because I don't understand and also don't master the vocabulary in English because my vocabulary is very limited
S5	The difficulty is that it is difficult to find vocabulary miss because I have limited vocabulary and also <u>do not know the content of the script that I will write</u>

The data from the interview above is supported by the data from students' writing below:

**Table 7. Students' Writing**

Students	Writing Text
S3	Raja Ampat is located in the province of West Papua. This attraction is one of the many "must-see" attractions in Indonesia. Travelers who want to spend most of their time exploring a charming part of the globe will love Raja Ampati.
S5	Perched proudly in the heart of South Sumatra, Indonesia, the Jam Gadang is has more than just a clock tower. it's a living testament.. As the day wears on and the sun climbs higher in the sky, the Jam Gadang remains a steadfast

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sentinel, its timeless presence a beacon of continuity in an ever-changing world.

As evening approaches and the sky blushes with hues of pink and orange, the Jam Gadang takes on a magical quality, bathed in the soft glow of streetlights and the flickering flames of oil lamps. The Jam Gadang remains a timeless symbol of tradition, culture, and community.

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In the S3 descriptive text on Raja Ampat, the student seems to have had a little difficulty describing the object. In addition, some areas can be improved or added to make the description more complete and interesting, such as by adding information about where exactly Raja Ampat is located and how to reach it. Natural beauty, for example, the student can describe in more detail the natural beauty offered, such as the underwater scenery, coral reefs, and biodiversity.

In the S5 descriptive text on Jam Gadang. This student seems to have difficulty in finding a clear topic and content. The paragraphs provided are descriptive enough but lack a clear focus or strong structure. The student can add more factual information and details to support the description. For example, mentions when Jam Gadang was built, who built it, and what important events happened around it, and in the first paragraph there is an error, which should be *“Perched proudly in the heart of Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, Indonesia, the Jam Gadang is more than just a clock tower; it’s a living testament to the region’s rich history and cultural heritage.”*

The data presented above revealed that the difficulties faced by students stemmed from an insufficient understanding of the content within the descriptive text. Based on theory Wearmouth et al., (2003), the difficulty of students in writing descriptive text is a lack of knowledge relating to the subject contents of the script to be written.

#### 4. Generating Ideas

Difficulty in generating ideas is a challenge often faced by students in writing descriptive texts. The data from the interview are shown in the table below:

**Table 8.** Students’ Voice

Students	The difficulties
S9	The difficulties I encountered were, difficulty in assembling a good and correct sentence structure and <u>difficulty generating ideas for writing description texts</u>
S10	My difficulties are finding the vocabulary, and grammar I don’t understand and <u>generating ideas</u>

The data from the interview above is supported by the data from students’ writing below:

**Table 9.** Students’ Writing

Students	Writing Text
S9	<i>Parangtritis Beach is one of Yogyakarta’s top tourist destinations, located in Kretek District, approximately 27 km south of the city. The beach offers stunning scenery, with a large rock formation on the left side, appearing to shield the coast from incoming waves. Visitors can enjoy various activities, including swimming, sunbathing, and exploring the nearby caves.</i>

**S10** *Tanah Lot is a famous tourist attraction, and almost all tourists who spend their holidays in Bali take the time to visit this place. Tanah Lot features two temples: one on a large rock in the middle of the beach and another on a cliff jutting into the sea. Tanah Lot Temple is one of the Sad Kahyangan Temples, which aims to protect the beauty and safety of Bali. Visitors can enjoy the breathtaking sunset views, explore the temple grounds, and take part in cultural ceremonies held at the temple.*

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In the S9 descriptive text on Parangtritis Beach, the description of the scenery lacks detail. She could add other information such as activities to do, facilities available, or a brief history of the beach.

In the S10 descriptive text on the Tanah Lot, the text does not provide much information about the history or cultural significance of the Tanah Lot. A brief explanation of the history of the temple's construction or its spiritual significance could have added depth to the description. Also, information about facilities available around Tanah Lot, such as restaurants, souvenir shops, public toilets, and parking lots are not mentioned. Adding this information will help visitors plan their visit better.

From the data above generating ideas is one of the difficulties they face. Difficulty in generating ideas can affect students' ability to write descriptive text by limiting their ability to generate interesting and varied ideas. Students need to continue practicing their creativity and imagination to overcome this difficulty and produce quality writing. The finding was supported by Jayanti (2019) who mentioned that students struggled with identifying objects, generating related ideas, understanding simple present tense structures, having a limited vocabulary, and making mechanical errors.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The study analyzed the difficulties faced by tenth-grade students at an Islamic High School in Jakarta in writing descriptive text. Through interviews, several key findings emerged, shedding light on the difficulties encountered by students in this context. The research identified four difficulties experienced by students: students had difficulty with understanding grammar, vocabulary, knowledge relating to the content, and generating ideas. These difficulties were echoed in the responses of the interviewed students, highlighting common difficulties encountered during the process of writing descriptive text.

Furthermore, this emphasizes the importance of mastering grammar rules and expanding vocabulary to enhance writing skills effectively. Additionally, the findings underscored the significance of addressing difficulties in sentence structure and idea generation. These aspects play crucial roles in the coherence, clarity, and creativity of descriptive writing, and addressing these challenges is essential for improving overall writing proficiency. Lastly, the study contributes to the existing literature by providing insights into the specific difficulties faced by students at an Islamic High School in Jakarta when writing descriptive texts. In conclusion, the research highlights the multifaceted nature of difficulties encountered by students in writing descriptive texts and emphasizes the importance of targeted interventions to address these challenges effectively. By addressing issues related to grammar, vocabulary, idea generation, and content knowledge, educators can empower students to become more proficient and confident writers in English.

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