

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, the identification of the problems, the limitation of the study, the research questions, the objectives of the study, the significance of the study, and the definition of key terms. This research focuses on investigating students' writing difficulties in descriptive texts at SMPN 7 Jakarta.

1.1 Background

Writing is an essential language skill that plays a pivotal role in communication, academic achievement, and professional development. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), it serves not only as a medium for communication but also as a tool for developing and applying linguistic knowledge, including vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Brown, 2003). As a productive skill, it allows learners to convey ideas, knowledge, and experiences in a coherent and meaningful manner.

Despite its importance, mastering written expression is widely considered the most challenging language skill. According to Harmer (2007), producing written texts requires learners to generate ideas, organize them logically, and communicate them accurately. Similarly, Richards and Renandya (2008) emphasize that the composing process involves complex cognitive tasks such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing, all of which demand high levels of

linguistic and mental control. Compared to listening, speaking, or reading, these factors make written expression particularly demanding.

In EFL settings, students frequently encounter obstacles due to limited vocabulary, insufficient grammatical knowledge, and difficulties in organizing ideas coherently. Graham and Perin (2007) highlight that while written proficiency is crucial for academic success, many learners struggle to produce cohesive paragraphs. Such challenges often result in low confidence and hesitation, particularly for students with limited exposure to English text production outside the classroom.

Within the Indonesian junior high school context, the development of writing skills remains problematic. English is taught as a foreign language, and opportunities to practice written communication beyond classroom instruction are scarce. Previous research has shown that students commonly face difficulties related to grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, which negatively impact their overall performance (Anggraini, 2020; Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Limited practice and minimal teacher feedback further restrict students' ability to improve their composition skills.

Descriptive texts, in particular, present specific challenges for this age group. Composing descriptive pieces requires learners to systematically depict people, places, or objects while applying appropriate vocabulary and grammar. Byrne (1988) notes that many students struggle to organize information clearly, resulting in disjointed or unclear descriptions. Supporting this, Ismayanti and Kholiq (2020) found that learners often have difficulty understanding the generic

structure of descriptive texts, creating coherent paragraphs, and selecting precise descriptive vocabulary.

Although numerous studies have explored writing difficulties, most have focused on senior high school or university students. Research on junior high school learners, particularly seventh graders, remains limited. At this developmental stage, students are still building foundational English writing skills and learning to recognize various text types (Kristiana et al., 2021). Their challenges are influenced not only by linguistic limitations but also by cognitive and psychological factors, such as restricted writing experience and low self-confidence (Hyland, 2019). Additionally, differences in students' educational backgrounds may further affect the development of their written expression.

Despite the growing number of studies on students' writing difficulties, several research gaps remain. First, the majority of previous studies have focused on senior high school or university students, while research at the junior high school level, particularly seventh grade, is still limited. Second, many studies tend to examine writing difficulties from a single perspective, mainly linguistic aspects such as grammar and vocabulary, with limited exploration of the combined influence of linguistic, cognitive, and psychological factors. Third, only a few studies have specifically linked students' writing difficulties to their prior learning background, especially their exposure to English instruction during elementary school.

In addition, SMPN 7 Jakarta presents a unique context compared to other schools, as several students reported not receiving adequate English instruction in elementary school, particularly in learning descriptive texts. This condition

potentially contributes to distinctive patterns of writing difficulties that may differ from findings in previous research. Therefore, further investigation is needed to explore these aspects in greater depth. This study is motivated by the researcher's preliminary observations during English learning activities at SMPN 7 Jakarta.

Based on classroom observations, the researcher found that many seventh-grade students struggled to write in English, particularly when asked to write descriptive texts. During informal interactions, several students stated that they had not received English instruction during their elementary school years. As a result, they experienced difficulties in understanding basic vocabulary, sentence structures, and writing conventions in English. This lack of early exposure to English writing appears to contribute to students' difficulties and low confidence in writing at the junior high school level. However, this issue has not been widely discussed in previous studies.

The students' difficulties in writing descriptive texts are further supported by their classroom performance and assessment scores, which indicate that many students have not yet reached the expected competency level. During English lessons at SMPN 7 Jakarta, students often produced texts that were incomplete, lacked coherent organization, and contained frequent grammatical and vocabulary errors.

These issues were reflected in their writing scores, which were consistently below the minimum criteria set by the curriculum, demonstrating that their linguistic, cognitive, and psychological challenges directly impacted measurable outcomes. The low scores highlight that students' difficulties are not only observable in classroom behavior but also quantifiable in their academic

performance, emphasizing the urgent need for instructional strategies that address language mastery, cognitive structuring, and affective support to improve descriptive writing skills.

Despite the importance of descriptive writing in the junior high school curriculum, there is still a lack of in-depth research that specifically explores the writing difficulties faced by seventh-grade students in the Indonesian EFL context, particularly those related to students' prior learning experiences. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the difficulties encountered by seventh-grade students at SMPN 7 Jakarta in writing descriptive texts. The findings of this study are expected to provide insights for teachers in designing more effective teaching strategies and supporting students with diverse educational backgrounds in developing their writing skills. In light of this context, the researcher proposes a study entitled "*An Analysis of Seventh-Grade Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text: A Case Study at SMPN 7 Jakarta.*"

1.2. Research Questions

This study is conducted to answer the following questions:

- 1) What difficulties do seventh-grade students at SMPN 7 Jakarta face in writing descriptive text ?
- 2) What strategies do seventh-grade students employ to address these difficulties in writing descriptive text?

1.3 Purposes of the Study

This study aims to identify the difficulties faced by seventh-grade students at SMPN 7 Jakarta in writing descriptive text and to examine the strategies used by

students these difficulties. By examining the obstacles that arise and the methods used to deal with them, the results of this study are expected to provide useful insights for the development of more effective English writing teaching strategies at the junior high school level. This study is based on the theory that appropriate pedagogical approaches can increase the effectiveness of learning to write in EFL contexts (Richards & Renandya, 2008; Graham & Perin, 2007).

1.4. Scope of the Study

This research focuses on analyzing the difficulties in writing descriptive text among seventh-grade students at SMPN 7 Jakarta. Descriptive text was selected because it serves as a foundational writing genre in junior high school curricula, enabling students to express ideas vividly, describe objects and people, and develop basic language competence essential for more complex writing tasks later on. The study does not examine other genres such as narrative, expository, or argumentative texts. It is limited to a qualitative analysis based on student interviews and questionnaires. While the findings may not be widely generalizable, they are anticipated to contribute meaningful insights into students' writing challenges within similar educational contexts.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study is expected to contribute to the field of English language teaching, particularly in improving students' writing skills in descriptive text. The findings of this study will provide insights into the difficulties faced by seventh-grade students at SMPN 7 Jakarta in writing descriptive texts and suggest possible solutions to overcome these challenges. The significance of this study is divided into two main aspects:

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

This study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge in English language teaching, particularly in the area of writing instruction. The findings will provide empirical evidence regarding the specific difficulties students face in writing descriptive text, supporting existing theories on second language writing challenges (Richards & Renandya, 2008; Harmer, 2007). The results may also help in the development of more effective pedagogical approaches for teaching writing in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

The findings of this study are expected to contribute significantly to various stakeholders involved in English language education, particularly in the development of students' descriptive writing skills.

1. For Teachers

The results of this study are expected to provide valuable insights into the specific difficulties students face when writing descriptive texts. This understanding can help teachers design and implement more effective teaching strategies to improve students' writing competence and engagement in the classroom

2. For Students

This research can help students become more aware of the writing mistakes they commonly make and gain a better understanding of how to overcome them. Through this process, students can develop greater confidence and motivation to improve the quality of their descriptive writing, which will ultimately improve their overall writing skills.

3. For Future Researchers

The results of this study can serve as a useful reference for future studies focusing on students' difficulties in writing descriptive texts or the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches used to overcome these challenges.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To avoid misinterpretation, the following key terms are defined:

1. **Descriptive Text** – A type of writing that provides detailed information about a person, place, or thing, using vivid language to create a clear picture in the reader's
2. **Writing Difficulties** – The challenges written descriptive text including linguistic, cognitive, and psychological factors (Hyland, 2019)
3. **Junior High School Students** – Students in the first year of junior high school (seventh grade), typically aged 12–13, who are learning English as a foreign language.