STUDENTS' WRITING ABILITY AND DIFFICULTIES IN RECOUNT TEXT COMPOSITION

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kemampuan dan kesulitan siswa dalam menulis teks recount di SMP Qu Cahaya Al-Qur'an Padang Panjang. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan melibatkan 11 siswa kelas IX sebagai partisipan. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes menulis teks recount dan kuesioner untuk mengidentifikasi kesulitan siswa dalam menulis. Penilaian difokuskan pada dua aspek utama, yaitu struktur generik dan fitur kebahasaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan siswa dalam menulis teks recount berada pada kategori cukup. Sebagian besar siswa mengalami kesulitan dalam mengorganisasi ide, menggunakan struktur tata bahasa yang tepat, serta memilih kosakata yang sesuai. Hasil kuesioner mendukung temuan tersebut, yang menunjukkan bahwa siswa terutama mengalami kesulitan pada aspek fitur kebahasaan dan penggunaan tata bahasa. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan strategi pembelajaran yang lebih terarah untuk meningkatkan kemampuan menulis teks recount siswa.

Kata kunci: *menulis, kemampuan menulis, teks, kesulitan*

Abstract

This study aims to analyze students' ability and difficulties in writing recount texts at SMP Qu Cahaya Al-Qur'an Padang Panjang. The research employed a qualitative descriptive method involving 11 second-grade students as participants. Data were collected through a recount text writing test and a questionnaire to identify students' writing difficulties. The assessment focused on two main aspects: generic structure and language features. The findings revealed that students' overall ability in writing recount texts was categorized as fair. Most students experienced difficulties in organizing ideas, applying correct grammatical structures, and using appropriate vocabulary. Questionnaire results supported these findings, showing that students struggled particularly with language features and grammar usage. These difficulties indicate the need for more focused instructional strategies in teaching recount text writing. The study recommends that teachers provide more guided practice and emphasize the application of generic structure and language features to improve students' writing skills.

Key words: *writing,writing ability, recount text, writing difficulties*

INTRODUCTION

Among all of language skills, writing is often regarded as the most complex, particularly for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It requires learners to integrate various linguistic components simultaneously, such as grammar, vocabulary, organization, and mechanics, while also generating and developing ideas coherently (Brown, 2001; Harmer, 2004). Consequently, many students encounter difficulties in producing well-structured and meaningful written texts.

In secondary education or Junior High School, writing plays a significant role in supporting students' academic achievement and communicative competence. Through writing activities, students are expected to express ideas, experiences, and information clearly and systematically. However, EFL learners often struggle with writing due to limited vocabulary, insufficient grammatical mastery, and lack of confidence in using English. These challenges are commonly found in Indonesian classrooms, particularly at the junior high school level, where students are still developing their foundational English skills (Sari, 2018).

One text type taught at the junior high school level is the recount text, which functions to retell past events or experiences in chronological order (Anderson & Anderson, 2003). Recount text is theoretically accessible to students because it is closely related to their daily experiences. Structurally, recount text consists of orientation, events, and re-orientation, while linguistically it is characterized by the use of simple past tense, temporal conjunctions, and specific participants. Despite its clear structure, many students find it difficult to write recount texts effectively (Sari, 2017; Sutrisno et al., 2023).

Previous studies have reported that students often experience problems in maintaining the generic structure and applying appropriate language features in recount text writing. Hyland (2003) argues that understanding the concept of a genre does not necessarily lead to successful text production. Students may understand the structure of recount text at a theoretical level but still struggle to apply this knowledge in actual writing tasks. This gap between conceptual understanding and practical ability is a common issue in EFL writing instruction.

Grammatical competence is one of the main challenges faced by students in writing recount texts. Many students have difficulty applying the simple past tense consistently and tend to mix it with present tense forms. Such grammatical errors can obscure meaning and reduce the clarity of written texts (Brown, 2001). In addition to grammar, limited vocabulary knowledge restricts students' ability to express ideas in detail, leading to repetitive and simplistic sentences. Nation (2001) emphasizes that insufficient vocabulary is a major obstacle in foreign language writing.

Another difficulty lies in organizing ideas coherently. Writing a recount text requires students to sequence events logically and use temporal markers to guide readers through the narrative (Sari, 2017). However, students often struggle to arrange events chronologically, resulting in texts that lack coherence. According to Tribble (1996), effective organization is a crucial element of good writing, as it enables readers to follow the writer's ideas easily.

These difficulties were also observed at SMP Qu Cahaya Al-Qur'an Padang Panjang. Based on preliminary observations, many students showed low performance in recount text writing. They were often confused about how to begin writing, how to develop ideas into coherent paragraphs, and how to apply grammatical rules correctly.

As a result, their written texts frequently contained errors in both structure and language use.

Understanding students' ability and difficulties in writing recount texts is important for increasing writing instruction. By identifying specific areas of difficulty, teachers can design instructional strategies that better address students' needs. Harmer (2004) suggests that effective writing instruction should guide students through the writing process and provide sufficient practice and feedback. Therefore, this study aims to analyze students' ability and difficulties in writing recount texts at SMP Qu Cahaya Al-Qur'an Padang Panjang, focusing on generic structure and language features. The findings are expected to contribute to more effective teaching practices in EFL writing classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method to analyze students' ability and difficulties in writing recount texts. The participants of this study were 11 students from class IX.A at SMP Qu Cahaya Al-Qur'an Padang Panjang, selected through purposive sampling.

Data were collected using two instruments: a writing test and a questionnaire. The writing test required students to write a recount text based on a given topic, while the questionnaire was used to identify students' perceived difficulties in writing recount texts. The data were analyzed by evaluating students' writing based on generic structure and language features, supported by descriptive analysis of questionnaire responses.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Overview of Students' Ability in Writing Recount Texts

Based on the results of the recount text writing test administered to 11 ninth-grade students of SMP Qu Cahaya Al-Qur'an Padang Panjang, it was found that students' ability in writing recount texts was generally categorized as *fair*. This assessment was based on two main aspects, namely generic structure and language features, which are considered the core characteristics of recount text writing (Anderson & Anderson, 2003; Hyland, 2003).

In general, most students were able to understand the purpose of recount text as a type of text used to retell past experiences. However, this conceptual understanding was not fully reflected in their actual writing performance. This finding supports Harmer's (2004) view that theoretical knowledge of writing does not necessarily correspond to practical writing ability, particularly among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

The assessment results indicated that none of the students reached the *excellent* category, while the majority were classified into the *fair* and *good* categories, and a smaller number fell into the *poor* category. This distribution suggests that students' recount text writing ability remains at a moderate level and still requires further development.

2. Analysis of Students' Ability Based on Generic Structure

Generic structure reveals the fundamental framework of recount text, which consists of orientation, events, and re-orientation (Anderson, 1997). The findings revealed that most students were able to write the orientation section adequately. In this part, students generally succeeded in identifying the time, place, and participants

involved in the recounted events. Orientation shows the students' ideas or interest about a specific topic or information that they want to share to the readers (Sari, 2017).

However, problems began to emerge in the events section. Many students experienced difficulties in organizing events in a clear chronological order. Some texts showed illogical jumps between events, while others presented events randomly without clear temporal markers. This condition reflects students' limited ability to organize ideas systematically, as highlighted by Tribble (1996), who emphasized that idea organization is a crucial element of coherent writing.

The re-orientation section was also frequently omitted or inadequately developed. Several students ended their texts abruptly without providing a clear conclusion. This indicates that students have not fully understood the function of re-orientation as an optional closing element that serves to provide a final impression or reflection on the recounted events (Hyland, 2003).

These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Sari, Refnaldi, and Rosa (2013), which reported that junior high school students tend to experience difficulties in maintaining the complete generic structure of recount texts, particularly in the concluding section.

3. Analysis of Students' Ability Based on Language Features

Language features can be refer to the linguistic aspects of recount text writing, including the use of simple past tense, temporal conjunctions, and specific participants. The analysis of students' written texts revealed that language features constituted the main source of difficulty for most students.

In the finding, the most dominant errors were related to verb usage. Many students frequently mixed present tense and past tense forms within a single text. These errors indicate that students have not yet achieved sufficient grammatical mastery, particularly in applying the simple past tense. Brown (2001) emphasized that grammatical competence is a fundamental component of writing skills, as grammatical errors can obscure meaning and reduce textual clarity.

In addition, the use of temporal conjunctions such as *then*, *after that*, *finally*, and *when* was very limited. Some texts did not include any temporal markers at all, making the sequence of events difficult to follow. In fact, temporal conjunctions play a crucial role in recount texts by signaling the order of events and ensuring textual coherence (Anderson & Anderson, 2003).

Moreover, students tended to rely on simple and repetitive word choices when we relate it to vocabularies. This limited vocabulary range hindered their ability to express ideas in a more detailed and varied manner. This finding aligns with Nation's (2001) argument that limited vocabulary knowledge is one of the major obstacles in foreign language writing.

4. Students' Difficulties in Writing Recount Texts Based on the Questionnaire

The questionnaire results reinforced the findings of the writing test. Most students found experiencing difficulties in writing recount texts, particularly in terms of grammar usage and idea development. Although several students claimed to understand the recount text material taught in class, they still encountered difficulties when applying this knowledge in their written work.

This phenomenon indicates there is a gap between knowledge about language and knowledge of language use, as proposed by Hyland (2003). Students

may possess theoretical understanding of recount text, yet struggle to apply it effectively in actual writing contexts.

Furthermore, students' low interest in English writing lessons also contributed to the difficulties they faced. Some students perceived writing as a boring and challenging activity. Such negative attitudes can affect students' learning motivation, which in turn influences their learning outcomes (Harmer, 2004

5. Implications of the Findings for Writing Instruction

The findings of this study have essential implications for writing instruction at the junior high school level. First, teachers need to place greater emphasis on explicit and repeated instruction of text structure. The use of model texts and guided practice can help students understand and apply the generic structure of recount texts more consistently.

Then, grammar instruction should not focus purely on rules, but also on their application in meaningful writing contexts. A genre-based approach may serve as an effective alternative to help students understand the relationship between text structure and language features (Hyland, 2003).

Finally, teachers should create a supportive and motivating learning environment that encourages students to write. Selecting topics that are closely related to students' personal experiences and providing constructive feedback can enhance students' confidence and engagement in writing activities.

CONCLUSION

This study examined students' ability and difficulties in writing recount texts at SMP Qu Cahaya Al-Qur'an Padang Panjang, focusing on generic structure and language features. The findings indicate that students' overall writing ability is categorized as *fair*. While most students demonstrated a basic understanding of the purpose of recount texts, this understanding was not consistently reflected in their written work.

The analysis revealed that students experienced difficulties in organizing events chronologically and completing the re-orientation section, indicating limited mastery of recount text structure. In addition, grammatical problems especially in the use of the simple past tense together with limited vocabulary and minimal use of temporal conjunctions, hindered students' ability to express ideas clearly. Questionnaire results confirmed that grammar and idea development were the main challenges faced by students.

Through these findings, it is strongly suggested the need for more explicit instruction and guided practice in recount text writing. Emphasizing text structure, grammar application, and vocabulary development may help improve students' writing performance more effectively.

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