

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Writing is an essential basis upon which one's learning and intelligence would be judged. Writing skill trains students with thinking skills and communication as well. It also raises our ability to explain and enhance our ideas ourselves and to others (Aulya, 2020). Moreover, writing gives ability to speak to our inner thoughts and consents us to share them. Writing emphasizes students on mechanics, developing their perspective, comprehension, phonic, and communicating this perspective to others in relations of description or narration (Ho, 2015).

Writing is a part of the four language skills taught in the Junior High School in Indonesia (Sadiku, 2015). According to the 2013 Curriculum, the EFL learning goal is to develop the students' knowledge of text's structure, social function, and language elements. Aside from the social function, language element and text structure, they are trained to write a text focused on its indicators, namely, writing a suitable title, appropriate topic sentence, developing the topic sentence into a coherent paragraph, arranging supporting sentences coherently, constructing grammatical sentences, using appropriate words or phrases, using correct mechanics (Saputra et al., 2013).

The seventh graders of the Junior High School have been studying how to write a descriptive paragraph in English. Descriptive writing functions on describing an object, person, location, or place. It events to involve all five senses of the reader to evoke the sounds, sights, tastes, smells, and feel of the subject of the text (Zoubi, 2019). In descriptive text, the writer does not only tell the reader what was felt, seen, smelled, tested, or heard. Rather, the writer has an idea to describes something from his/her experience and, through careful choice of words and phasing, and make it seems real. Descriptive writing is detailed, colorful and

vivid (Linunokas, 2020). As they wrote, they usually focused on writing a suitable title, deciding on appropriate topic sentence, developing the topic sentence, constructing grammatical sentences, arranging supporting sentences coherently, using appropriate words or phrases, and using appropriate writing mechanics (Setyaningsih et al., 2021).

Despite the scientific approach applied in the 2013 Curriculum, with its five-stages, observation, question, exploration, association, and communication, the students still found writing a descriptive text very difficult to accomplish. In prior observation, the students often had difficulty in writing a descriptive text of a person, an animal, or a procedure. When they were asked of the sources of difficulty, they did not give clear answers to the questions, let alone logical explanations of the sources of difficulty.

The present research was directed to ascertain the types and sources of difficulty in writing descriptive texts of a person, an animal, and a procedure in the Junior High School. The present research was comparable to previous research in case of analyzing the difficulty types and sources. Previous research was focused more on language elements rather than the seven writing indicators aforementioned.

For example, (Irnawati et al., 2020) has done a research entitled “An analysis of students’ difficulties in writing descriptive text by using a picture of the 7th-grade SMPN 05 Tamansari”. The study was focused solely on difficulties in writing descriptive texts. The design was purely descriptive qualitative research. The subjects consisted of all the seventh-graders of the Junior High School. The data was collected through documents and an interview guide. The obtained data were analyzed qualitatively. The research findings showed difficulties grouped as difficulty in using grammar (33.98%), difficulty in choosing appropriate word (10.15%), sentence structure (12.11%), and difficulty of preposition (7.17%). This research was different to the current research in relations of its research object; it was limited on the difficulty without explaining the sources of difficulties.

Another research was conducted by Murti et al. (2021). Murti (2021) studied types and causes of difficulties of tenth-grade students in SMK Negeri 1 Pedan in writing descriptive texts of various focuses. His research was descriptive and qualitative in nature. The subjects consisted of 30 students and two EFL teachers. The data were collected by means of a document and an interview guide; and, the obtained data were analyzed descriptively and qualitatively following qualitative data analysis procedures from Miles and Huberman. The data analysis showed the types of difficulties found in the students' writing 1) spelling (37.7%), 2) punctuation (19.1%), 3) grammatical (24.7%), and 4) word usage (23.5%). The sources of difficulties were classified into 1) interlingual transfer, 2) intralingual transfer, and 3) contexts of learning.

Murti's research was dissimilar to this research in terms of focus and elaboration. Murti's research was limited on the language element, like word spelling, punctuation, grammar, and word usage. Whereas, the present research was focused on the seven main indicators in writing a descriptive text, they are, text's title, topic sentence, development of the topic sentence into a whole paragraph, constructing grammatical sentences, arranging supporting sentences coherently, using appropriate words or phrases, and using appropriate writing mechanics. Moreover, Murti's research did not systematically juxtapose a difficulty type and its difficulty source. For example, a spelling difficulty was not specified as its source of difficulty, it could be an inter-lingual, intra-lingual, or context of learning. It would be clear when the researcher put a difficulty type in line with its source and explanation.

The present research was conducted in SMPN 2 Tejakula. The school was chosen based on the result of preliminary observation conducted by the researcher in SMP Negeri 2 Tejakula. It was focusing on the seven-writing indicators, namely: text's title, topic sentence, development of the topic sentence into a cohesive paragraph, arrangement of supporting sentences systematically and coherently, word or phrase usage, and writing mechanics. The

subject of this study would be seventh grade students (VIIIF class). They are chosen because of the class had the highest percentage in making difficulty on their writing when the researcher conducted the writing test on the preliminary observation. It led the researcher to conduct a study in SMP Negeri 2 Tejakula.

1.2 Problem Identification

Prior to the statement of the research problems, a preliminary study was conducted. The students were requested to write descriptive text in three different topic of a person, animal, and procedure. Each paragraph should contain a title, a topic sentence, development of the topic sentence, arrangement of supporting sentences, word or phrase usage, grammatical sentences, and writing mechanics. Each paragraph should be written in simple English and it should not exceed five sentences. There were thirty students sampled in the preliminary study. When analyzed, difficulties were identified as follows.

1. Difficulty in choosing descriptive texts' titles. A descriptive text's title is usually written in a single word or a phrase in which the first letter of the word or each of the words of a phrase is/are capitalized and it summarizes the description content. A title is also meant for a description that the writer uses as a heading, for example 'My Teacher'. In writing a descriptive text's title, the students were not able to choose suitable texts' titles (10 %);
2. Difficulty in writing topic sentences. A topic sentence is a sentence which addresses the topic. A topic sentence usually tells the reader what you are going to be writing about. A topic sentence must be written in a declarative, active, positive, and simple sentence, for example, "My teacher has many likable qualities". In writing a topic sentence, the students found difficulty in telling the reader what they really wanted to be writing about (10%);
3. Difficulty in developing the topic sentence into a whole paragraph. To develop a paragraph from a topic sentence, all a writer has to do is to ask the topic sentence questions. Then he/she takes the answers to these questions, and writes a paragraph out of them. With this

method, he/she would never have trouble filling up space again. However, many students found it difficult to ask the topic sentence questions (15%);

4. Difficulty in arranging supporting sentences systematically. In developing supporting sentences in paragraph, writer should be giving descriptions, reasons, or examples to support the topic sentence. There are 3 - 5 supporting sentences in developing the topic sentence of a paragraph. They should be organized in a logical order. They should relate to the topic and not begin another topic or introduce a new idea. In this indicator, the students also found difficulty in organizing the supporting sentences in order (15%);
5. Difficulty in constructing grammatical sentences used in the supporting sentences (30%). Grammatical difficulties found frequently during preliminary study were of: incorrect word form, incorrect tense or verb form, subject-verb agreement, incorrect use of articles, wrong or missing prepositions, incorrect singular/plural agreement, unclear pronoun reference, and omitted commas. The students often made mistakes in constructing grammatical sentences (20%);
6. Difficulty in word/phrase usage. Usage is how a word or a phrase is used. Usage discusses the conformist ways in which phrases and words are used, in written or spoken form. It can also refer to rules or practices in spelling and pronunciation. For example, a malapropism is a kind of incorrect use of a word. The students did use writing diction and/or misspelled the words (20%);
7. Difficulty in writing mechanics. Writing mechanics are important aspects of writing. It is including capitalization, spelling, abbreviations, and punctuation. Finding out an idea and writing down into a paragraph could be a challenge. The solution of this problem is by creating draft first before writing. The students often found use proper writing mechanics (10%).

1.3 Research Questions

The seven afore-mentioned problems found by the Junior High School students in writing descriptive paragraphs at *Tejakula* were stated into research questions.

- 1) What difficulties are faced by students in writing descriptive paragraphs viewed from the writing indicators in SMPN 2 *Tejakula*?
- 2) What sources of difficulties are found in writing descriptive paragraphs viewed from the writing indicators in SMPN 2 *Tejakula*?

1.4 Research Scope

The present research was limited to analyze the students' types of difficulties as they were found in writing descriptive paragraphs in English and their sources or reasons for such problems. The research was conducted during the pandemic in the months of August and December 2021 at SMPN 2 *Tejakula*.

1.5 Research Objectives

1.5.1. General Objective.

In general, the research was aimed to identify and analyze the difficulty types and sources viewed from the writing indicators, they are, title, topic sentence, development of the topic sentence, organizing the supporting sentences, constructing grammatical sentences, word or phrase usage, and using proper writing mechanics as they were faced by the students in the Junior High School at *Tejakula*.

1.5.2 Specific Objectives.

The specific research objectives were stated in the following.

- 1) To identify and classify the difficulties in writing descriptive paragraphs viewed from the specific writing indicators as they were faced by the Junior High School students at *Tejakula*;

- 2) To identify and explain the sources of difficulties in writing descriptive paragraphs viewed from the specific writing indicators as they were faced by the Junior High School students at *Tejakula*.

1.6 Research Significance

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance.

The research's findings were concerning the types of difficulties and their sources viewed from the writing indicators as they were faced by the Junior High School students at *Tejakula*. It could be used to attribute to the students' weakness or failure of memory and/or competency in writing descriptive paragraphs in English. Also, the research findings could be also used to learn a language, a student creates a system of rules from the language data to which he/she is exposed to.

1.6.2 Practical Significance.

- 1) The Junior High School students could use the types and sources of difficulties to improve their writing competency in general, and writing descriptive paragraphs of a person, an animal, or a procedure;
- 2) The EFL teachers could also be benefitted as they could devise learning methodology which improve the quality of learning materials, learning activities, learning media, learning evaluation, and learning outcomes in writing to the Junior High School students;
- 3) Future researchers could also use the current research findings to design research in the area of difficulty analysis with sophisticated research methodology including research design, subjects, data gathering processes, data analysis method as well.