

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Writing is the primary basis upon which one's learning and intellect will be judged. Writing skill equips students with communication and thinking skill as well. It also fosters our ability to explain and refine our ideas to others and ourselves (Aydoğan & Akbar, 2014; Aulya, 2020; Baene,2021). Moreover, writing gives voice to our inner thoughts and allows us to share them. Writing focuses students on phonics, comprehension, mechanics, developing their perspective, and communicating this perspective to others in terms of description or narration (Ho,2015; Astin,2021).

Writing is one 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 social function, text structure, and language elements. Aside from the social function, text structure, and language element, they are trained to write a text focused on its indicators, namely, writing a suitable title, writing a 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 (Kurikulum,2013; Darling-Hammond et al.,2015).

The seventh graders of the Junior High School learn how to write a descriptive text in English. A descriptive text functions on describing a single location, object, event, person, or place. It endeavors to engage all five of the reader's senses to

evoke the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings of the text's subject (Harmenita,2013; Husna,2013; Fitriani,2019). In descriptive writing, the writer does not just tell the reader what was seen, felt, tested, smelled, or heard. Rather, the writer describes something from his/her experience and, through careful choice of words and phasing, makes it seem real. Descriptive writing is vivid, colorful, and detailed (Emilia,2010). As they wrote, they usually focused on writing a suitable title, deciding on appropriate topic sentence, developing the topic sentence into a whole paragraph, constructing grammatical sentences, arranging supporting sentences coherently, using appropriate words or phrases, and using appropriate writing mechanics (Kusumawardhani, 2015; 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 difficult to accomplish. In prior observation, the students found difficulties in writing a descriptive text of a person and an animal viewed from the writing indicators, they are 1) writing a suitable title, 2) determining a topic sentence, 3) developing a topic sentence into a cohesive paragraph, 4) arranging the supporting sentences into a coherent paragraph, 5) writing grammatical sentences, 6) using appropriate diction, and 7) applying appropriate writing mechanics. They did not give good explanations about reasons they had on those writing indicators.

This research was conducted to ascertain the types and reasons for difficulty in writing descriptive texts of a person and an animal in *Sekolah Menengah Pertama Negeri 1 Sawan* (hereinafter: *SMPN 1 Sawan*). This research was not similar to previous researches on error analysis. Previous researches on types of error were

classified as sentence fragments, sentence sprawl, misplaced and dangling modifiers, faulty parallelism, unclear pronoun reference, incorrect pronoun case, omitted commas, or superfluous commas (Corder,1981; Brown,1982; Bhatia,2000). This research was focused on difficulties based on writing indicators, they are the students' inability to 1) write a suitable title, 2) determine a topic sentence, 3) develop a topic sentence into a cohesive paragraph, 4) arrange the supporting sentences into a coherent paragraph, 5) write grammatical sentences, 6) use appropriate diction, and 7) apply appropriate writing mechanics (Kusumawardhani, 2015; Setyaningsih et al., 2021).

Also, previous research on sources of errors explained in terms of over-generalization, rule restriction, false concept hypothesized, inter-lingual transfer, or intra-lingual transfer (Richards,1974; Corder, 1981; Dulay et al,1982; Brown,2000;). However, this research explained causes of difficulty due to 1) absence of knowledge on descriptive text's social function, text structure, and language element, 2) poor prior knowledge on descriptive text's social function, text structure, and language element, 3) poor memory on descriptive text's social function, text structure, and language element (Kusumawardhani, 2015; Setyaningsih et al., 2021; Murray in Pohan, 2018)).

Another previous research was conducted by Irnawati et al.,(2020). They conducted a research entitled "An analysis of students' grammatical difficulty in writing descriptive text by using picture of the 7th-grade *SMPN 05 Tamansari*. The study was focused solely on grammatical difficulty in writing descriptive texts. The design was a purely descriptive qualitative research. The subjects consisted of all the seventh-graders of the Junior High School. Data were collected through

documents and interview guide. The obtained data were analyzed qualitatively. The research findings showed grammatical difficulty grouped as verb-to-verb concordance (33.98%), noun-to-noun concordance (10.15%), sentence structure (12.11%), and error of preposition (7.17%). This research was different to this research in terms of its research object; it was limited on the grammatical difficulty without explaining the reasons for difficulty.

Murti (2021) also studied types and causes of difficulty committed by the tenth grade students of *SMK Negeri 1 Pedan* in writing descriptive texts. His research was a descriptive qualitative in nature. The subjects consisted of 30 students and two EFL teachers. Data were collected by means of a document and an interview guide; and, the obtained data were analyzed descriptively and qualitatively following the Miles and Huberman's qualitative data analysis procedures. The data analysis showed the types of difficulty found in the students' writing 1) spelling difficulty (37.7%), 2) punctuation error (19.1%), 3) grammatical difficulty (24.7%), and 4) word usage difficulty (23.5%). The reasons for difficulty were classified into 1) inter-lingual transfer, 2) intra-lingual transfer, and 3) contexts of learning.

Murti's research was different 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, this 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 juxtaposed type of difficulty and

its difficulty source. For example, a spelling error was not specified its source of error, it could be an inter-lingual, intra-lingual, or context of learning. It would be clear when the researcher put type of difficulty in line with its source and explanation.

This research was focused 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. A text title refers to an overall text's content or its controlling theme. A topic sentence refers to the main idea or content of a paragraph. Topic sentence development refers to enlargement of an outline paragraph or creating descriptions for the whole paragraph. Sentence arrangement refers to systematic sequences of supporting sentences into a coherent paragraph. Grammatical sentence refers to the correct application of grammatical rules in the sentences. Word usage refers to the way a word, or a phrase, or concept is used in a language. Writing mechanics are the conventions governing the technical aspects of writing, including spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviations.

1.2 Problem Identification

Prior to statement of the research problems, a preliminary study was conducted. The students were asked to write two different descriptive paragraphs of a person and an animal. 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 to ten sentences for

both paragraphs. There were thirty students sampled in the preliminary study. The students' difficulties were identified and described in the following.

1. Difficulty in choosing descriptive paragraphs' titles. A descriptive paragraph's title is usually written in a single word or a phrase which the first letter of the word or each of the word 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 paragraph'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 that 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 likeable 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 write a paragraph out of them. With this method, he/she will never have trouble filling up space again. However, many students found it difficult in asking the topic sentence questions (15%);
4. Difficulty in arranging supporting sentences systematically. When writing supporting sentences, a writer should be giving examples, reasons, or descriptions to support the topic sentence. There are usually 3 - 5 supporting sentences in a paragraph, and they should be arranged in a logical order. They

should not begin a new 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 difficulty found frequently during preliminary study were of : incorrect subject-verb agreement, tense or verb form, incorrect singular/plural agreement, incorrect word form, unclear pronoun reference, incorrect use of articles, wrong or missing prepositions, 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 used. Usage refers to the conventional ways in which words or phrases are used, spoken, or written. It can also refer to rules or practices in spelling and pronounced. For example, a malapropism is the mistaken use of an incorrect word in place of a word with a similar sound, resulting in a nonsensical, sometimes humorous utterance. The students did use inappropriate writing diction and/or misspelled the words (20%);
7. Difficulty in writing mechanics. Writing mechanics are the conventions governing the technical aspects of writing, including spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviations. Getting your main points together can be a challenge, and one solution is to put together a draft of main ideas before writing. The students often found to use improper writing mechanics (10%).

1.3 Research Questions

The seven afore-mentioned problems found by students in writing descriptive paragraphs of a person and an animal are stated into the following research questions.

- 1) What difficulties are found by the students in writing descriptive paragraphs of a person and an animal viewed from writing indicators in *SMPN 1 Sawan*?
- 2) What reasons for difficulties are found from the students in writing descriptive paragraphs of a person and an animal viewed from writing indicators in *SMPN 1 Sawan*?

1.4 Research Scope

This research was limited to analyze the students' types of difficulty and reasons for such difficulty in writing descriptive paragraphs of a person and an animal in *SMPN 1 Sawan*. Due to the pandemic, one class was studied. There were thirty seventh graders altogether in the academic year 2020/2021. There two descriptive texts of a person and animal explored their social function, linguistic structure, and language element which were represented in writing indicators as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

1.5. Research Objectives

1.5.1. General Objective.

The general research objective was to identify and analyze the difficulty and reasons for difficulty viewed from 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 committed by students in *SMPN 1 Sawan*.

1.5.2 Specific Objectives.

The specific research objectives are stated in the following.

- 1) To identify and classify the difficulty in writing descriptive paragraphs viewed from the specific writing indicators committed by *students in SMPN 1 Sawan*.
- 2) To identify and explain reasons for difficulty in writing descriptive paragraphs viewed from the specific writing indicators committed by *students in SMPN 1 Sawan*.

1.6 Research Significance

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance.

The research findings were used to overcome the students' weakness or failure in writing descriptive paragraphs of a person and an animal with proper social function, linguistic structure, and language element. The research findings could be used to learn a system of rules from the language data to which they are exposed to.

1.6.2 Practical Significance.

- 1).The students could learn from difficulties to improve their writing competency in general, and writing descriptive paragraphs of a person, an animal, a thing, or a procedure;
- 2).The EFL teachers could design and develop learning methodology to improve the quality of learning materials, learning activities, learning

media, learning evaluation, and learning outcomes in writing in *SMPN 1 Sawan*;

- 3).Future researchers could use the current research findings to design a new research basing on his research findings.

