

Students' Vocabulary Mastery in Writing Recount Texts of Eleventh Grade Students (A Descriptive Qualitative Research at the Grade Student 11th of MA KH Syafi'I Pekalongan)

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Abstract

Vocabulary mastery plays an important role in students' writing ability, especially in composing recount texts that require descriptive language and chronological narration. This study aims to analyze students' vocabulary mastery in writing recount texts and to identify the challenges faced by students when applying vocabulary in their writing. This research used a descriptive qualitative method. The participants were eleventh grade students of MA KH Syafi'i Pekalongan. The data were collected through classroom observation, document analysis of students' recount texts, and semi-structured interviews. The results show that students have different levels of vocabulary mastery in writing recount texts. Some students are able to use varied vocabulary such as descriptive verbs, adjectives, and time connectors, while others tend to use repetitive and general vocabulary. Several factors influencing students' vocabulary use include limited vocabulary knowledge, difficulty choosing appropriate words, interference from the first language, lack of confidence, and limited exposure to English outside the classroom. The findings indicate that vocabulary mastery significantly influences the quality of students' writing. Therefore, integrating vocabulary learning with writing practice is important to improve students' writing ability.

Keywords: vocabulary mastery, writing skill, recount text, EFL students, qualitative study

Abstrak

Penguasaan kosakata memiliki peran penting dalam kemampuan menulis siswa, khususnya dalam menulis teks recount yang membutuhkan bahasa deskriptif dan penyusunan peristiwa secara kronologis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penguasaan kosakata siswa dalam menulis teks recount serta mengidentifikasi kendala yang dihadapi siswa dalam menggunakan kosakata saat proses menulis. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Subjek penelitian adalah siswa kelas XI MA KH Syafi'i Pekalongan. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, analisis dokumen berupa teks recount yang ditulis siswa, serta wawancara semi terstruktur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penguasaan kosakata siswa dalam menulis teks recount berbeda-beda. Beberapa siswa mampu menggunakan kosakata yang bervariasi seperti kata kerja deskriptif, kata sifat, dan penghubung waktu, sedangkan siswa lainnya cenderung menggunakan kosakata yang berulang dan umum. Beberapa faktor yang mempengaruhi penggunaan kosakata siswa antara lain keterbatasan kosakata, kesulitan memilih kata yang tepat, pengaruh bahasa pertama, kurangnya kepercayaan diri, serta terbatasnya paparan bahasa Inggris di luar kelas. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa penguasaan kosakata sangat mempengaruhi kualitas tulisan siswa. Oleh karena itu, pembelajaran kosakata perlu diintegrasikan dengan kegiatan menulis untuk meningkatkan kemampuan menulis siswa.

Kata kunci: penguasaan kosakata, keterampilan menulis, teks recount, siswa EFL, penelitian kualitatif.

INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in global communication, education, and professional interaction. In the era of globalization, English has become one of the most widely used languages for accessing information, academic resources, and international collaboration. Consequently, English is taught in many countries, including Indonesia, as a foreign language. In the Indonesian education system, English learning aims to develop students' communicative competence through the mastery of four fundamental language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are interconnected and must be developed simultaneously in order to enable learners to communicate effectively in both spoken and written forms.

Among these four language skills, writing is often considered the most challenging skill for students to master. Writing requires learners not only to generate ideas but also to organize those ideas into coherent and meaningful texts. In addition, students must apply grammatical rules, select appropriate vocabulary, and maintain logical connections between sentences and paragraphs. Harmer (2004) states that writing is a complex process because it involves cognitive, linguistic, and creative aspects at the same time. Therefore, students often struggle when they are asked to produce written texts in a foreign language, particularly when they have limited language resources.

One of the most essential language components that influences writing ability is vocabulary mastery. Vocabulary serves as the basic element of language that allows learners to express ideas, feelings, and information. Without adequate vocabulary knowledge, students will find it difficult to communicate their thoughts clearly and effectively. Nation (2020) explains that vocabulary knowledge enables learners to construct meaningful sentences and communicate ideas effectively in both

spoken and written language. In writing activities, vocabulary plays an important role because it helps students select precise words, describe events more vividly, and construct coherent texts. Students who possess rich vocabulary knowledge are generally able to express their ideas more clearly and creatively, while students with limited vocabulary tend to produce repetitive and less meaningful sentences.

In senior high school, students are introduced to various text genres as part of the English curriculum. One of the text types taught to students is recount text. Recount text is a type of text used to retell past experiences or events in chronological order. According to Hyland (2021), recount text aims to inform or entertain readers by describing events that occurred in the past. The structure of a recount text generally consists of three parts: orientation, which introduces the participants, time, and place of the event; events, which describe the sequence of activities or experiences; and reorientation, which provides a concluding statement or personal reflection. Writing recount texts requires students to use appropriate vocabulary, especially verbs in past tense, time connectors, and descriptive expressions to clearly describe events.

Despite the importance of vocabulary in writing recount texts, many students still experience difficulties in expressing their ideas in written form. One of the most common problems faced by students is limited vocabulary mastery. Students often rely on a small number of familiar words when writing sentences. As a result, they tend to repeat the same vocabulary throughout their texts. In addition, students frequently translate words directly from Indonesian into English without considering the appropriate context or grammatical structure. This direct translation often produces unnatural expressions and reduces the clarity of the text. Consequently, students' writing becomes less varied, less descriptive, and sometimes difficult to understand.

Several previous studies have emphasized the significant relationship between vocabulary knowledge and writing ability. Research conducted by Astuti and Lestari (2022) revealed that students with broader vocabulary knowledge tend to produce more coherent, detailed, and descriptive writing compared to students with limited vocabulary. Similarly, Putri and Sari (2023) reported that vocabulary limitation is one of the main obstacles faced by Indonesian EFL learners when writing narrative and recount texts. Their study indicates that students' difficulties in selecting appropriate vocabulary often lead to repetitive sentences and unclear ideas.

Although previous studies have highlighted the importance of vocabulary mastery in writing, many of them focus mainly on quantitative correlations between vocabulary knowledge and writing scores. Therefore, there is still a need for qualitative exploration that examines how students actually use vocabulary when writing and what specific difficulties they experience during the writing process. Understanding these aspects is important because it can provide deeper insights into students' writing behavior and help teachers design more effective teaching strategies.

Based on these problems, this research aims to analyze students' vocabulary mastery in writing recount texts and to identify the challenges faced by students when applying vocabulary during the writing process. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of English teaching practices, particularly in improving students' vocabulary mastery and writing ability.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a descriptive qualitative research design. Qualitative research is used to explore and describe a phenomenon in depth by understanding participants' experiences, perspectives, and behaviors within a particular context.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research focuses on interpreting meaning derived from participants' views and examining social phenomena in their natural setting. The descriptive qualitative approach was chosen in this study because it allows the researcher to analyze students' vocabulary mastery in writing recount texts in a detailed and contextual manner. Through this approach, the researcher was able to investigate how students use vocabulary in their writing and identify the difficulties they encounter during the writing process.

The research was conducted at MA KH Syafi'i Pekalongan, a senior high school located in Central Java, Indonesia. This school was selected as the research site because recount text writing is included in the English curriculum for eleventh grade students, making it relevant to the focus of this study. The research was conducted during the English learning process in which students were assigned to write recount texts based on their personal experiences.

The participants of this research were eleventh grade students who had studied recount text in their English subject. The participants were selected using purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a technique used to select participants based on specific criteria related to the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, the criteria for selecting participants included students who had participated in recount text writing activities and students who represented different levels of vocabulary mastery. By selecting participants with varied abilities, the researcher was able to obtain more comprehensive information about students' vocabulary use in writing recount texts.

The data sources in this research consisted of primary data and supporting data. The primary data were obtained from students' written recount texts and students' responses during interviews. Meanwhile,

supporting data were obtained through classroom observations that documented students' learning activities during the writing process.

Data were collected using three techniques: observation, document analysis, and interviews. These techniques were used to obtain comprehensive data and to ensure the credibility of the research findings.

Observation was conducted during the English learning process in the classroom. The purpose of the observation was to examine students' activities and behaviors during the writing process, particularly how they attempted to use vocabulary when composing recount texts. During the observation, the researcher noted students' participation, their strategies in choosing words, and the difficulties they encountered while writing.

Document analysis was conducted by analyzing students' written recount texts. The researcher collected students' writing assignments and examined the vocabulary used in their texts. The analysis focused on several aspects, including the variety of vocabulary used by students, the repetition of certain words, and the appropriateness of vocabulary in describing events. This analysis helped the researcher identify patterns of vocabulary use and determine the level of students' vocabulary mastery in writing recount texts.

Interviews were also conducted with several selected students in order to obtain deeper information regarding their experiences and difficulties when using vocabulary in writing. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, which allowed the researcher to ask prepared questions while also giving participants the opportunity to explain their experiences freely. Through the interviews, the researcher obtained additional insights into students' perceptions, challenges, and strategies related to vocabulary use in writing.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles,

Huberman, and Saldaña (2019). This model consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, simplifying, and organizing relevant data obtained from observations, documents, and interviews. Data display involves presenting the organized data in the form of descriptions or tables to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusion drawing refers to the process of interpreting the findings and identifying patterns related to students' vocabulary mastery in writing recount texts.

To ensure the credibility of the research findings, the researcher applied data triangulation by comparing data obtained from different sources, including observation results, document analysis, and interview data. This triangulation technique helped strengthen the validity of the findings and provided a more comprehensive understanding of students' vocabulary mastery in writing recount texts.

FINDING(S) AND DISCUSSION

Students' Vocabulary Use in Writing Recount Texts

The analysis of students' recount texts reveals that students demonstrate different levels of vocabulary mastery in their writing. Some students were able to use varied vocabulary when describing their experiences. These students employed descriptive verbs such as *visited*, *enjoyed*, *explored*, and *experienced* to narrate the events they wrote about. The use of such verbs indicates that these students were able to select more specific vocabulary to describe past events, which helped make their recount texts clearer and more engaging.

In addition to using descriptive verbs, several students also applied temporal connectors to organize the sequence of events in their recount texts. Words such as *first*, *then*, *after that*, and *finally* were used to structure the narrative chronologically.

The use of these connectors shows that some students understand the linguistic features of recount texts, particularly in presenting events in a logical sequence. According to Hyland (2021), the use of time expressions is an important element in recount texts because it helps readers follow the order of events being described. However, the analysis also shows that many students still demonstrate limited vocabulary use in their writing. Several students relied heavily on general and repetitive vocabulary such as *go*, *see*, *play*, and *eat* to describe different activities. For instance, a student wrote sentences such as "I go to the beach with my family" and "After that we go to the restaurant," repeating the same verb multiple times. This repetition suggests that students have a restricted vocabulary range and lack alternative words to express similar meanings.

Another issue found in students' writing is the inappropriate use of vocabulary in certain contexts. Some students selected words that were grammatically correct but less suitable for describing specific events. This indicates that although students may know certain vocabulary items, they may not fully understand how to use them appropriately within a particular context. Furthermore, the influence of the students' first language was also identified in several recount texts. Some students translated Indonesian expressions directly into English, resulting in unnatural or awkward phrases. For example, expressions such as "*we walk-walk around the market*" reflect the direct translation of Indonesian phrases such as *jalan-jalan*. This phenomenon is common among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners who rely on their first language when they lack sufficient vocabulary knowledge in the target language. Nation (2020) explains that first language interference often occurs when learners attempt to fill vocabulary gaps by translating expressions from their native language.

These findings suggest that students' vocabulary mastery significantly affects the quality of their writing. Students with broader vocabulary knowledge tend to produce more descriptive and varied texts, while students with limited vocabulary knowledge often produce repetitive and less detailed writing.

Factors Affecting Students' Vocabulary Use

Based on the results of the interviews conducted with several students, a number of factors were identified as influencing students' vocabulary mastery when writing recount texts.

The first factor is limited vocabulary knowledge. Many students admitted that they do not possess sufficient vocabulary to express their ideas clearly in English. When writing recount texts, they often struggle to find appropriate words to describe events, feelings, or experiences. As a result, they tend to rely on simple and familiar vocabulary, even though those words may not fully represent the intended meaning.

The second factor is difficulty in selecting appropriate words. Some students reported that they know several English words but are unsure about their correct usage in sentences. This uncertainty makes students hesitant to use new vocabulary, leading them to choose simpler and more familiar words. This problem reflects the limited depth of vocabulary knowledge among students, where learners may recognize a word but may not fully understand its meaning, grammatical function, or contextual use.

The third factor is lack of confidence in using English vocabulary. Several students expressed fear of making mistakes when using unfamiliar words. Because of this fear, they prefer to use simple vocabulary that they feel more confident about. This lack of

confidence can reduce students' willingness to experiment with new vocabulary, which ultimately affects the variety of vocabulary used in their writing.

Another factor influencing students' vocabulary use is limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Most students reported that they rarely use English in their daily communication. Their interaction with English mainly occurs during English lessons at school. As a result, students have limited opportunities to encounter and practice new vocabulary in authentic contexts. According to Webb and Nation (2022), frequent exposure to language input plays an important role in vocabulary acquisition because learners need repeated encounters with words to fully understand and use them effectively.

The findings of this study indicate that vocabulary mastery is closely related to students' writing ability. Students who possess broader vocabulary knowledge are more capable of expressing ideas clearly and producing more descriptive texts. On the other hand, students with limited vocabulary knowledge tend to rely on repetitive words and simpler sentence structures. These findings support previous studies which highlight that vocabulary knowledge is one of the key factors influencing students' writing development in EFL contexts.

Overall, the results of this research emphasize the importance of integrating vocabulary learning with writing activities in the classroom. Teachers need to provide more opportunities for students to expand their vocabulary through reading activities, contextual vocabulary exercises, and guided writing practices.

Challenges in Vocabulary Use

Based on interview results, several challenges affecting students' vocabulary use were identified.

First, many students admitted that they have limited vocabulary knowledge, making it difficult to express ideas in more detailed sentences.

Second, students sometimes feel confused about choosing the correct word when writing in English.

Third, students lack confidence in using new vocabulary because they are afraid of making mistakes.

Finally, students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Most students only use English during English lessons, which limits their opportunities to learn new vocabulary.

These findings indicate that vocabulary mastery significantly influences students' writing ability. Students who possess richer vocabulary knowledge tend to produce more descriptive and coherent recount texts.

CONCLUSION(S)

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that students' vocabulary mastery plays a significant role in their ability to write recount texts. The analysis of students' writing shows that learners with better vocabulary knowledge are able to produce more descriptive, varied, and well-organized texts. These students tend to use more specific verbs, appropriate adjectives, and temporal connectors to describe past events in a chronological sequence. As a result, their recount texts become clearer and more engaging for readers. This finding confirms that vocabulary knowledge is a crucial component in developing students' writing ability, particularly in constructing meaningful sentences and expressing ideas effectively.

However, the findings of this study also reveal that many students still encounter several difficulties when writing recount texts. The most common difficulty is limited vocabulary knowledge, which causes students to rely heavily on simple and repetitive words when describing events. In addition, some students experience confusion when selecting appropriate vocabulary to express their ideas, which often leads to inaccurate or less effective word choices. The influence of the students' first language was also identified as a factor affecting vocabulary use, as some students tend to translate Indonesian expressions directly into English. Furthermore, a lack of confidence in using unfamiliar vocabulary often discourages students from experimenting with new words in their writing.

Another important factor influencing students' vocabulary use is the limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Since many students rarely use English in their daily communication, their opportunities to encounter and practice new vocabulary are restricted. This condition affects their ability to develop a broader range of vocabulary that can support their writing activities. Therefore, vocabulary learning should not only focus on memorizing word meanings but also on practicing how to use vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

Based on these findings, several pedagogical implications can be suggested. English teachers should provide more opportunities for students to develop their vocabulary through various learning activities, such as reading exercises, vocabulary enrichment tasks, and contextual writing practice. Integrating vocabulary instruction with writing activities can help students apply newly learned words in meaningful sentences and paragraphs. In addition, teachers should encourage students to use a wider range of vocabulary and provide constructive feedback on their writing in order to

improve their confidence and language accuracy.

In conclusion, improving students' vocabulary mastery is an important step in enhancing their writing ability. By strengthening students' vocabulary knowledge and providing meaningful writing practice, students can develop the ability to express their ideas more clearly and effectively in recount texts.

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