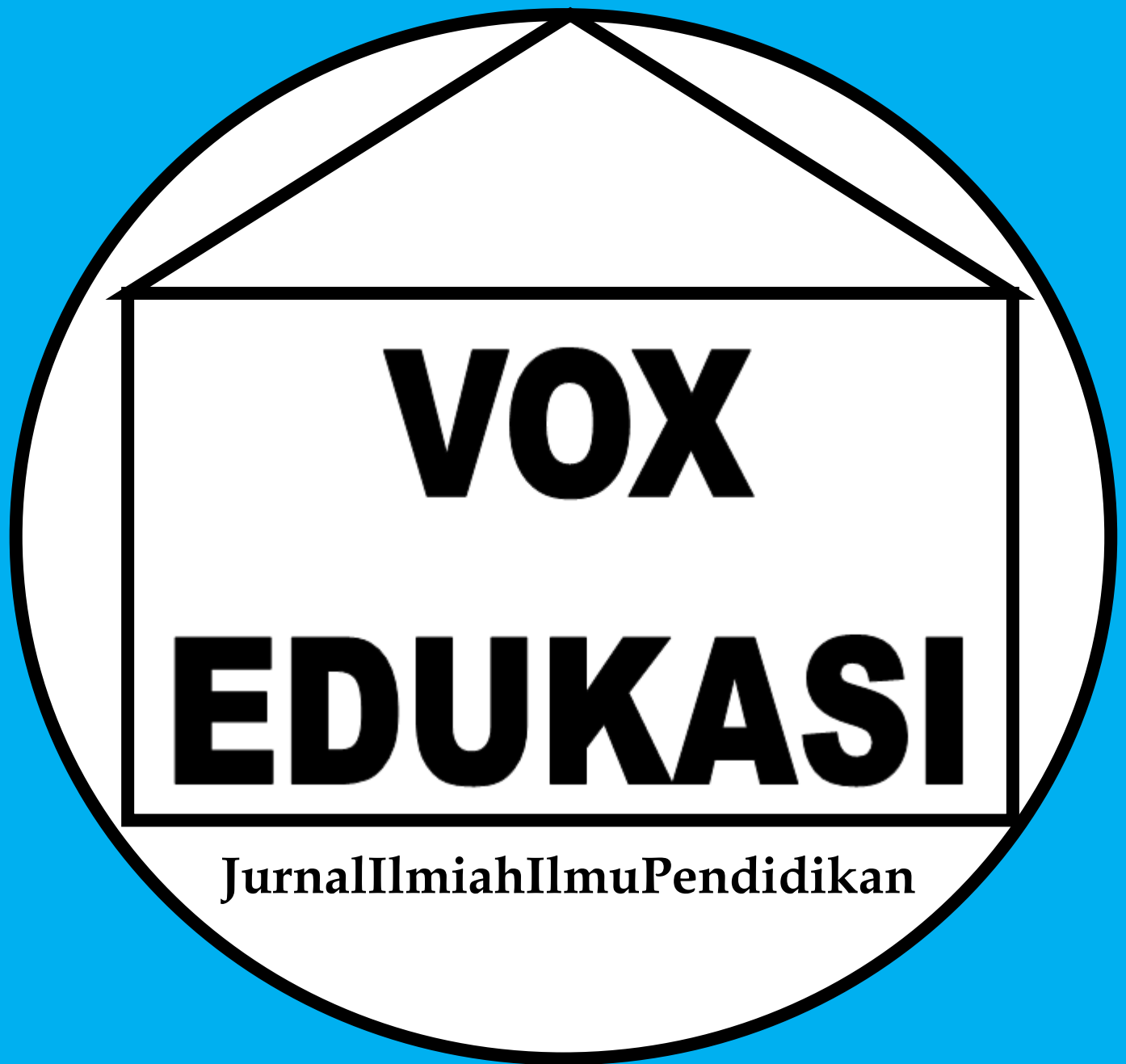


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DAFTAR ISI

THE INFLUENCES OF FLASHBACK TO THE PLOT“THE IRON LADY” MOVIE Thomas Joni Verawanto Aristo <i>Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang</i>	01–10
STUDENTS’ WRITING DIFFICULTY IN COMPOSING A DESCRIPTIVE TEXT (A Quantitative Study of the First Year Students at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang) Wa Ode Ritna Yuniyur Ullah <i>Prodi Pendidikan Ekonomi, STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang</i>	11–21
STUDI PENERAPAN MEDIA KUIS INTERAKTIF BERBASIS GAME EDUKASI KAHOOT! TERHADAP HASIL BELAJAR MAHASISWA Gres Dyah Kusuma Ningrum <i>Fakultas Teknik, Universitas Negeri Malang</i>	22–27
APPLYING ESA (ENGAGE, STUDY, ACTIVATE) STRATEGY TO IMPROVE STUDENTS’ SPEAKING ABILITY Ilinawati <i>Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang</i>	28–40
A STUDY OF MIND MAPPING COLLABORATIVE WRITING TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS Sijono <i>Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang</i>	41–55
PENINGKATAN PEMAHAMAN KONSEP DAN HASIL BELAJAR MATEMATIKA SISWA KELAS III SDN 25 RAJANG BEGANTUNG II MELALUI TEKNIK PROBING-PROMPTING Andri, Anyan & Lenni Marsella Sarry <i>Prodi PGSD, STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang</i>	56–70
PENGEMBANGAN PERANGKAT PEMBELAJARAN FISIKA BERBASIS EMPAT PILAR PENDIDIKAN MELALUI OUTDOOR-INQUIRY UNTUK MENINGKATKAN KEBIASAAN BEKERJA ILMIAH PADA MATERI MOMEN GAYA, FLUIDA, DAN KESEIMBANGAN STATIS DI IKIP PGRI PONTIANAK Lukman Hakim, Suparmi, & Mohammad Masykuri <i>Program Studi Magister Pendidikan Sains Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta</i>	71–81

STUDENTS' WRITING DIFFICULTY IN COMPOSING A DESCRIPTIVE TEXT

(A Quantitative Study of the First Year Students at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang)

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Abstract: The fact that writing was considered as difficult for most students still remained an unresolved issue. Yet, some educators still continued disregarding what was going on with students' writing difficulty to promote appropriate way in their teaching of writing. Thus this study was aimed at finding out students' writing difficulty in composing a descriptive text of the First Year Students at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang. This study employed quantitative descriptive analysis to describe students' writing difficulty. One class of first year students of English Language Study Program took part in this study. The data were gathered through writing test that was done on November 6th, 2017. The finding showed that students had significant difficulty in composing a descriptive text. It was proved by the mean score of students' writing quality, i.e. 46 or classified as *very poor* based on the criteria suggested by Jacob (1981). Therefore, it was imperative for the lecturer in this class to encourage the learners to give more emphasis on items seen difficult by the students in composing the text.

Keywords: students' writing difficulty, teaching writing, descriptive text

Abstrak: Keterampilan menulis dalam bahasa Inggris bagi sebagian besar mahasiswa masih dirasa sukar dan menjadi masalah yang belum terpecahkan. Namun, beberapa pendidik masih mengabaikan kesulitan mahasiswa tersebut untuk menemukan cara yang tepat dalam mengajar *Writing*. Olehnya itu, penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi kesulitan mahasiswa dalam menulis teks deskriptif pada mahasiswa STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian deskriptif untuk mengidentifikasi kesulitan mahasiswa dalam menulis. Subjek penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa kelas A1 semester pertama Program Studi Bahasa Inggris. Data penelitian dikumpulkan melalui tes menulis yang dilakukan pada bulan November tahun 2017. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memiliki kesulitan yang signifikan dalam menulis teks deskriptif. Hal ini dibuktikan dengan rata-rata skor mahasiswa 46 untuk kualitas *writing* yang diklasifikasikan sebagai kategori yang sangat rendah menurut kriteria menulis dari Jacob (1981). Oleh karena itu, dosen-dosen yang mengajar *Writing* sangat disarankan untuk menekankan pengajaran *Writing* pada hal-hal yang dirasa sukar bagi mahasiswa.

Kata Kunci: Kesulitan menulis mahasiswa, Pengajaran Menulis, Teks Deskripsi

Introduction

One of the most challenging and cumbersome skills to be mastered by students in learning English and still continue to be problematic skill for teacher to teach in the classroom is writing skill (Nunan, 1991). To know more deeply about such difficulty, it is imperative to conduct a research on students' writing difficulty. This was in line with the statement from Troia and Graham who suggested that one crucial step in elevating the status of writing instruction and its associated research is to identify what we know and where we need to invest further effort for the field to flourish and draw the attention it deserves from various stakeholders (Troia& Graham, 2003).

Parallel with the above thinking, then, this kind of research is exigent enough to employ on the ground that writing skill is very crucial for students to master and comprehend. This has been stated in the decree of the Minister of Education No. 22 (2006) that teaching English is targeted to develop students' oral and written communication competence. Owing to this respect, writing has always become primary consideration to be incorporated in the syllabus in

teaching English (Harmer in Wahyudi, 2009) such as what has been applied in the two newest curriculum namely Competence-based Curriculum (from 2004-2006), and School-based Curriculum (from 2006-early 2013). Therefore, teachers' responsibility is absolutely necessary not only to offer the learners support and encouragement but also to serve and provide appropriate guidance to the new invention of knowledge and information particularly in writing.

In reality, however, writing continues to be one of the most difficult areas for the teachers and learners of English to be tackled because it covers some skills that should be mastered by the learners. Allen (1981:1) assures that writing may truly be considered as the most difficult skill of those four skills. Furthermore, developing writing skills has always been the most complex and difficult aspect of language teaching (Shaughnessy, 1977).

Consistent with the above thinking, there have been some previous researches related to what aspects in students' writing difficulty being faced by students. Firstly, as reported by Graham and Harris, papers written by poorwriters are shorter,

more poorly organized, and weaker in overall quality (Graham, 1990; Graham & Harris, 1991). In addition, these students' compositions typically contain more irrelevant information and more mechanical and grammatical errors that render their texts less readable (Graham & Harris, 1991). Furthermore, the problems experienced by these poor writers are attributable, in part, to their difficulties with executing and regulating the processes underlying proficient composing, especially planning and revising (Graham & Harris, 1994a, 1997; Graham, Harris, & Troia, 1998). As a result, poor writers either "dive in" to writing assignments with little forethought or become immobilized when faced with a blank page and no conception of their final product (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Elbow, 1981; Torrance, Thomas, & Robinson, 1991). However, these researches do not address comprehensively about specific aspects of writing as suggested by Jacob (1981) that are also crucial in determining students' writing difficulty.

Accordingly, with regard to the above fact, the researcher considers

that it is exactly essential to conduct this study under two basic reasons. Firstly, most EFL teachers still do not realize the appropriate ways in approaching language teaching of writing. Thus, by considering the result of this study, the teacher will focus on what is assumed as the weaknesses side of the learners' writing difficulties. Secondly, some researchers find difficulties to determine the crucial problem to be treated that is experienced by the learners in writing. Therefore, this study will become basic source for further research because they have gotten prior scientific data from this study.

With respect to the above reason, this research was aimed to describe students' writing difficulty in composing a descriptive text of the first year students at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang.

Based on the above description, the research question of this study is: what is the difficulty of students' writing in composing a descriptive text of the first year students at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang?

This research is expected to make the following contributions:

1) Give a meaningful contribution for English teaching at the concerned general;

2) Become useful information especially for English teacher in performing learning and instructional process of writing to improve and increase the quality of students' writing ability;

This study investigated students' writing difficulty at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang in composing a descriptive text of writing in term of content, organization, vocabulary, language use (grammar), and mechanic (Jacob, 1981).

Methods

This study used descriptive qualitative study. Descriptive qualitative analysis meant that the students' writing difficulty would be commented and presented descriptively.

The population of this study was one class of first year students at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang who were registered in academic year 2017/2018.

This study used writing test as the main instrument to measure students' writing difficulty in

composing a descriptive text. The instrument included students' compositions from the test conducted by the researcher in Class A1 at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang.

Findings and Discussion

These findings answered the research question of this research namely: what is the difficulty of students' writing in composing a descriptive text of the first year students at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang. This involved some points that refer to the students' writing scores. The researcher assessed students' composition in a piece of ESL composition profile provided by Jacob (1981). After the assessment of students' writing quality from the two independent raters had been accomplished, the results were averaged by the writer to get final score of each student. Below is the description of each component of students' writing quality.

After collecting the students' scores into table, the researcher found that the highest score on content was 22 and the lowest score was 13. In order to determine the levels of students' writing difficulty on content, the researcher then classified the

students' scores into four interval scores as follow:

Table 4.1 The Level of Students Writing Quality on Content

No	Interval score	Level of writing quality	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	30 – 27	Excellent to very good	-	-
2	26 – 22	Good to average	1	3.33
3	21 – 17	Fair to poor	8	26.27
4	16 – 13	Very poor	21	70
Σ			30	100

From the above table, we can see that more than a half of students got scores that fell into *very poor level* of writing quality. It also showed that among all, just one student who got score ranging in *good to average level*. It indicated that content aspect still become a problematic one for students to deal with in writing. Therefore, the researcher concluded that the students' quality in composing a descriptive text in term of content still had limited development, did not show knowledge of subject, non-substantive, and even

for some it was still not enough to evaluate.

In order to determine the levels of students' writing difficulty on organization, the researcher then classified the students' scores into four interval scores as follow:

Table 4.2 The Level of Students' Writing Quality on Organization

No	Interval score	Level of writing quality	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	20 – 18	Excellent to very good	-	-
2	17 – 14	Good to average	2	6.67
3	13 – 10	Fair to poor	7	23.33
4	9 – 7	Very poor	21	70
Σ			30	100

In the above table, it was clear that most students got scores that still ranged in *very poor writing quality* as in content aspect, i.e. 21 students. It meant that the students still had significant trouble in organizing ideas in composing a descriptive text.

Therefore, the researcher concluded that in composing a descriptive text, most students still loosely organized their writing and still did not communicate well to the audience.

In order to determine the levels of students' writing quality in vocabulary, the researcher then classified the students' score into four interval scores as follow:

Table 4.3 The Level of Students' Writing Quality on Vocabulary

N o	Inter val score	Level of writin g qualit y	Freque ncy	Perce nt (%)
1	20 – 18	Excell ent to very good	-	-
2	17 – 14	Good to averag e	2	6.67
3	13 – 10	Fair to poor	9	30
4	9 – 7	Very poor	19	63.33
Σ			30	100

From the above table, we can see that likewise students' writing difficulty on organization, students' writing difficulty on vocabulary was also dominated by the students who got

scores that ranged in *very poor* quality. There was still not any significant change in number for those who got above *very poor* level or just about 36.67 % of all. Therefore, the researcher concluded that in composing a descriptive text, most students still had little knowledge of English vocabulary, essentially translation, and still made many errors of word choice.

In order to determine the levels of students' writing quality on language use, the researcher then classified the students' score into four interval scores as follow:

Table 4.4 The Level of Students' Writing Quality on Language Use

N o	Inter val score	Level of writin g qualit y	Freque ncy	Perce nt (%)
1	25 – 22	Excell ent to very good		
2	21 – 18	Good to averag e	1	3.33
3	17 – 11	Fair to poor	7	23.33
4	10 – 5	Very poor	22	73.33
Σ			30	100

From the above table, we can see that students' performance in grammar were even getting worse wherein about 73.33% of all fell into very poor quality. It was just one student who just fell into good to average quality. Hence, the researcher concluded that in composing descriptive text, most students still had problem on grammar, either making mistakes in simple/complex construction, frequent errors on agreement, tenses, or other grammatical mistakes.

In order to determine the levels of students' writing difficulty on mechanic, the researcher then classified the students' score into four interval scores as follow:

Table 4.5 The Level of Students' Writing Quality on Mechanic

No	Interval score	Level of writing quality	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	5	Excellent to very good	-	-
2	4	Good to average	-	-
3	3	Fair to poor	5	16.67
4	2	Very poor	25	83.3

Σ	30	100
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It was unlike the other four previous items of writing quality where students spread from *average* to *verypoor* quality. There were 5 students or about 16.67% of the total respondents who got scores that range from *fair to poor* of writing quality and more than a half or about 83.33% ranged in *very poor* quality.

Accordingly, the researcher concluded that in composing a descriptive text, students still made frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, or other mechanical errors and sometimes meaning was confusing or obscured.

Descriptive statistic was used to investigate the whole description of students' writing difficulty in composing a descriptive writing in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanic. Here, the researcher calculated all students' scores into statistical description that consisted of mean, range, median, mode, maximum score, and minimum score. For more clearly, the descriptive statistics of students' writing quality were shown in the following table:

Table 4.6 Data of Descriptive Statistic of Students' Writing Quality

Me an	Medi an	Mo de	Ma x. Sco re	Mi n. Sco re	Ran ge
46, 28	42.5	40	73	34	39

From the above table, we can see that the mean score of students' writing quality in composing a descriptive text was 46,28. It was obtained by dividing the total of students' score (1388.5) with 30 students as the total respondents (see appendix 2). Therefore, according to the criteria suggested by Jacob (1981) about classification of students' writing quality, the researcher interpreted that students' writing quality in composing a descriptive text was categorized as *very poor*. It meant that there were any significant difficulties faced by the students in composing a descriptive text. It could be limited knowledge of subject in term of content, lack logical sequencing in term of organization, frequent errors of words in term of vocabulary, major problems in simple/complex construction and tense in term of language use, or frequent error of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

In the same way, the median score of students' writing quality was 42.5 and it was nearly the same as the mean score. It meant that most students got score that ranged from 34-48 and wereclassified as *very poor* quality. Another fact, the table showed that the most frequently occurring score of students' writing quality or so-called *median score* ranged from 34-48 (*very poor* classification), i.e. 40.

Meanwhile, the range of students' writing quality was 39. It was obtained by reducing the maximum score (73) to the minimum score (34). The range showed that there was still a wide gap between the students who got *average* grade with the students who got *very poor* grade. Below was the summary of all five components of students' writing quality:

No	Writing Components	Mean score	Level of Writing Quality
1	Content	15.36	Very poor
2	Organization	9.4	Very poor
3	Vocabulary	9.5	Fair to poor
4	Language use	9.7	Fair to poor
5	Mechanic	2.1	Very poor

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the presentation of the above findings and discussion, the researcher concluded that students in the concerned universty in Sintang had *significant difficulty* in composing a descriptive text. It was proved by the mean score of students' writing quality, i.e. 46 or classified as *very poor* based on the criteria suggested by Jacob (1981). It meant that most of the students still faced many problems, either limited knowledge of subject, non fluent organization of ideas, frequent errors of word, major problems in simple/complex construction and tenses, or frequent error of spelling and punctuation.

Based on the above findings, the researcher recommended for the lecturer and next researchers as follow:

1. The result of this study showed that the students still found it difficult in all aspects of writing especially in content, language use, and mechanics with the range of mean score was in *very poor* quality. Therefore, it was imperative for the teacher of writing in this college to encourage the learners to give more emphasis on these items in composing a text.

2. As a prior scientific data, the result of this study was very necessary for further researcher to focus on these three difficult components of writing quality and investigate the cause of these problems.
3. This study was restricted in composing a descriptive text. Hence, it was important for the next researcher to investigate students' writing difficulty by using other types of text.
4. This study was conducted at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang, so it was likely for the next researcher to perform the study in different places, or even to use comparative design by comparing students' writing quality of two different schools.

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